

A New Life: Vol 1, Chapters 1-12

by Kage-sama

Category: Rurouni Kenshin
Genre: Romance
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2000-04-26 08:00:00
Updated: 2000-04-26 08:00:00
Packaged: 2016-04-27 15:30:51
Rating: M
Chapters: 1
Words: 33,342
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Kenshin makes a wish, but you know the saying...

A New Life: Vol 1, Chapters 1-12

Nicky Townsend, March-October '99 battousai@licensedtokill.com
Battoul028@aol.com

Disclaimer: Obviously, I am not so brilliant as to think up wonderful characters like those in Rurouni Kenshin. That honor goes to Watsuki Nobuhiro alone. I also have no musical talent, so also obviously, I didn't write the song "A New Life". That goes entirely to the two brilliant minds that make up the Pet Shop Boys. (All hail Neil Tennant!! All hail Chris Lowe!!)

All lyrics are used with out permission and are the God-given property of the people who wrote them, the bands who preformed them, the music companies who recorded them, and anyone else I may have forgotten.

Many thanks must go to Rissa, Hiko, Tae-san, Larry, Kathy-san, Tatsuko-san, and Todd, just to name a few. Many people helped make this what it is; whether they helped edit it, or just kept emailing me to make sure I finished it! In fact I must say that some people helped without ever knowing it. ^_^ (Note: Nicky has died from Anne Rice Hero Worship, and Pet Shop Boys Fangirl Sickness and gone to heaven)

A note for my readers: This is a revised edition of the first 11 chapters. Technially, this contains what originally was chapters 1-5, 6a and 6b, and 7-11. However do to revisions in the chapter stucture, chapter 6a is simply chapter 6, and chapter 6b is now chapter 7, making for a total of 12 chapters. Also, there were some significant rewrites to chapters 1-5; especially chapter 5.

Without further ado, welcome to the revised edition, and I hope you all enjoy it, and I'd like to hear what you thought!

~*~*~

A New Life: Volume One

A work of Rurouni Kenshin fanfiction By Nicky Townsend

~*~*~

Chapter One "Stars collect overhead, They look down on the channel,
And our lives grown dead Cars pass on through the night, How do you
get to Heaven, If you never try?"

the Pet Shop Boys, A New Life

The market was already crowded when Kenshin arrived, having risen early to get the daily shopping out of the way. You'd never know how much tofu three people could eat until you had to go and buy it everyday, he thought wryly to himself as he maneuvered deftly through the throng of people. He shook his head at how domestic his thoughts had become of late, and continued on. Domestic indeed, a very small, sarcastic part of his mind shot back at him. He squelched the voice as instantly as it appeared. He didn't need any of that now. Things had slowed down considerably. They had all gotten so used to all kinds of crisis popping up out of nowhere, that it had become nearly impossible to relax one's guard.

Not that I -like- all that excitement, Kenshin added to himself. It was just that the comparative silence that had surrounded the dojo of late had given him the feeling that this was the calm before the storm. He hurried on through the market to the appropriate stalls, and quickly purchased what he had come for. When he was alone now, he tended to think too much. And besides, he had laundry waiting for him.

He retraced his path, smiling at those that greeted him. The need to be home overwhelmed him, and he found himself hastening his steps. He couldn't for the life of him figure out what had made him so edgy.

"Sir?"

"Oro?" Kenshin spun around so quickly he almost splashed the poor man with whey from the tofu bucket. He looked the man over for a moment, wondering briefly how the seemingly normal man had sneaked up on him so easily. He seemed to be a normal peddler, if even a poorer one than most. The second of cold evaluation passed, and the usual warm smile returned to light Kenshin's face as he greeted the peddler. "Hello Sir. Is there something I can help you with?"

The peddler tipped his hat and winked. "On the contrary, Sir, you looked a bit under the weather, so I was wondering if maybe I could help you?"

Kenshin blinked in confusion. Help me...? The thought passed briefly through his brain, before being dismissed out of hand. He bowed shallowly to the old man, and shook his head. "I don't think so. I'm sorry, I must be going." He turned to head through the gate.

"Ah lad, are you so sure? It couldn't hurt to just look, could it?"

Something in the old man's voice made him hesitantly turn around again. He's right, a small part of himself added; it wouldn't hurt to just look. And if it would make the old peddler feel like he had done something good, then why not?

The peddler grinned, and took his pack off his back. "I have a few very special things today!" He produced a gaudy bronze mirror that looked ancient from his beat-up brown pack. "This mirror is said to be able to show events happening anywhere in the world! I have been told, however, that it prefers to choose its' owner." The old man read the barely hidden wince off Kenshin face and placed the mirror back in his pack. After digging through the deeper recesses of his bag, he pulled out a worn velvet case. After carefully lifting the top off, he proudly displayed its contents. "These earrings are said to give flawless skin to whomever wears them!"

Kenshin arched an eyebrow at that, and stated dryly, "What would I do with those?"

The old man sweatdropped. "Give them to a lady friend?"

Kenshin coughed lightly, "But wouldn't that be a bit insulting...?"

The sweatdrop grew. "I guess you're right...But it's not as if you'd have to tell her that's what they were for!" Pouting, he placed the top back on the box and stashed it back where it had come from, and dug hurriedly through the remaining contents of his pack.

"How about this?"

"No."

"Or this?"

"....."

"I see. Well I wasn't going to sell this, but..." He pulled a large and archaic looking ring out of his pocket. It had strange symbols intricately carved all over the band, and in the center was a small hole, where a stone might be set.

"But the stone is missing." Kenshin protested. The ring was beautiful in an old antique sort of way, but if it was missing its stone, there was no point in buying it.

"It never had a stone. That's why I didn't want to sell it. You see, this ring has a legend." The old man waved the ring in Kenshin's face. "It's said before you go to sleep, that if you prick your finger, and let a drop of blood fall into the setting here," the old man indicating the lack of stone, "and make a wish, that when you wake up, your wish will come true."

Kenshin chuckled at that, and shook his head. "What rubbish!"

The old peddler nodded, "Normally, I would agree with you. But this ring has a different sort of feel to it. Here; hold it for yourself, and see." He dropped the ring in Kenshin's proffered palm.

The ring hit his skin, and he felt a jolt. Indeed, the ring did have some sort of feeling to it. He turned it over carefully in his hand. "How much do you want for it?"

The old man eyed him for a moment. "You look like you could use a wish come true. Take it, and use it well. As far as I know, you'll only get one." He shouldered his pack with a grunt, and waved a quick good-bye, as he walked away and turned the far corner, leading back into downtown.

Kenshin watched the old man disappear. The wind was picking up, and whipping his hair around his face. The sky had darkened dangerously during the short conversation he'd had with the peddler. White arcs of lightning danced in the distance, and the sudden boom of thunder startled Kenshin out of his reverie. "Oro...? It looks like it's going to rain." With that he hurried through gate to the safety of Kaoru-dono's sturdy old house, and back to people who had become his family.

Later that night....

He'd been yawning all through dinner, and as soon as he finished the dishes, he quietly excused himself. Now he sat quietly on his futon, pondering the strange ring the peddler had given him. He normally wasn't superstitious, and he certainly didn't believe in magic, but there was just something about this ring...

It was like it exuded a force of some sort. Almost like it was calling him... "Well if it doesn't work, there's no harm done, right?" He whispered to himself. But what if it did work? What should he wish for? Happiness? Wasn't that selfish of him? Shouldn't he wish for all the internal conflicts of Japan to end?

He shook his head roughly. How was wanting happiness for himself selfish? Hadn't he done his part, and then some? He wanted to be able to live somewhere where his past wouldn't hound him, someplace where he didn't -need- to protect Kaoru-dono, where they could perhaps have a life together...

He picked up his sakabatou from where it lay beside his futon, and carefully removed it from its saya. He pondered the sharp side for a second, before he sliced shallowly into his thumb, and resheathed the blade. Taking the ring in his other hand, he let a small drop of blood fall into the setting, and placed it on the ring finger of his right hand.

"I wish that there will be a more peaceful time and place where Kaoru-dono and I can be together."

Waves of exhaustion rolled over Kenshin as he lay down to sleep. I suppose I'll know in the morning...That thought echoed dimly as his eyelids slid closed.

Sleep overtook Kenshin easily, as if sinking into the welcome darkness of death itself. A peaceful smile played on his handsome face, and he slipped into blissful unconsciousness.

~*~*~

Chapter 2

Note: Small warning...I've inserted myself into this fic...You'll know me when you see me, because I'm keeping my real name.

"Oi! Kenshin!!"

Someone was in his room. Pure reflex tore him from the comfort of his futon, his hand making a swipe for his sakabatou. He came up to his feet a mere second later, his feet planted firmly in battou-jutsu stance, his sword hand hovering over the hilt.

The intruder's eyebrow arched in question. "Well, aren't we a morning person? And I'm not an intruder. I'm your guide. So just sit back down and listen to me, okay?"

Kenshin grudgingly settled himself back down. This person... He couldn't tell if was male or female, was short in stature, and had close clipped white-blonde hair. It was perched comfortably on a stool that had magically appeared in the corner of his room.

"I'm here to inform you that your wish has been granted." The being began. "God, IHVH*, Allah, Yahweh, or Kami-sama, whatever you choose to call it, likes you. It's been watching you for many lives, and Its decided that you deserve a break for at least one lifetime."

"Now that I've informed you of this, I need to prepare you for your next life. Yes, you've died, and have been reborn. Deal with it. Your current awareness will be channeled into your new body shortly. Kaoru never married, instead throwing herself whole-heartedly into the dojo. Now, since your wish focused on Kaoru and yourself being together, she'll be in your next life as well. We've just stepped up the pace a bit."

The being hopped off the stool and handed him a manila folder. "The year is 1999. You're 17 years old. Your name is now Kevin Hannah. For your sake, we've allowed you to look the same, but we've removed your scar. And no, you can't have it back, so don't ask. It's inappropriate for the era."

"In the folder is your birth certificate, ID, Social Security card, and Passport. You were born in the United States; Sacramento, California to be specific. Your father is in the US. Air Force, and your family has just moved to Japan. Your mother is a very accomplished psychologist. Your older brother is an English major in college."

"After much debate we've decided to allow you to keep all your memories of being Himura Kenshin. However, you're going to have Kevin's memories to deal with, and you may become confused. But never fear, after a while the blending will feel normal."

The being placed it's palms on his temples, and pressed lightly. "Get ready to awaken!" A flood of memories passed through his brain, he saw himself being born, falling out of a tree when he was five and having to get stitches, his first day in school, and later on, his first relationship, the first time he smoked a cigarette... they just kept coming and coming... finally he saw himself go to bed the night before, his first night in Japan. He had to start school in the morning. He had to wear a uniform. The now huge part of him that had

lived in California and spent his evenings drinking coffee with his friends cringed at the idea. The part of him that had been a peaceful rounin in the Meiji era of Japan didn't think the idea was a bad one at all.

"Hey! Kevin!"

"Yes?" He felt himself respond automatically.

The being nodded happily. "That's a good sign! What year were you born?"

"1850...."

"No, the other time you were born!"

"1981?"

"Right! Much better. Try not to get the two mixed up okay? There was a going to be a language problem, but God, being God of course, foresaw it and fixed it already. We had to mess with Kevin's memories a little, but here's the cover story: You had a friend who was really in to anime, who convinced you to take Japanese at school with him. Also, I'll be going to school with you, so if you need help, you'll be able to find me. My name is Nicky, by the way." The being snapped it's fingers and took on a decidedly female appearance, complete with school uniform. She looked at the uniform in disgust. "I may have to wear this dumb uniform but I'm not wearing loafers!" She exchanged her brown loafers for a pair of calf-high black lace-up boots.

Flashing a V sign, she winked. "My trusty Doc Marten's! I never leave Heaven without them! This is what I'll look like. And now...." Nicky looked at her silver wristwatch. "...Okay we still have some time. Do you have any questions?"

Kevin started. Questions? What in the world should he ask? He was now aware of things like automobiles, microwave ovens, computers, department stores where you can buy almost anything, and those machines that spit out money, called ATMs. He was vaguely aware that once, back when he had lived in California (he wasn't quite sure what that was yet) that he had had his own car. Although the memory was slightly fuzzy, he could still remember, or perhaps see was a better word, how to drive it and even fix it if he needed to.

Was that how it was going to be? He -remembered- being Kenshin. He had been Kenshin for 28 years. Kevin was someone that he had never been, although he now had his memories, his body (which looked exactly like his) and in fact his whole life. He had literally been uprooted, and unceremoniously dropped in some poor kid's body. Nicky shook her head. "What you're thinking is only partially true. You and Kevin have always shared a soul. So in fact, you have always been with him. All people carry the memories of their past lives with them, all I did was wake your memories up inside Kevin, and allow you to continue as if you never died. Did that make sense?"

"So your saying that every life I've ever lived is still stored inside me somewhere; I just don't remember them?" He couldn't help but allow a touch of skepticism to enter his tone.

"That's right. Well, some people remember more than others. Compared to most, you remember a great deal of your past lives. There is a reason you were so good with your sword. You've been accumulating the skills over many lives!"

He contemplated that revelation for a moment. "What about Kaoru-dono?" He asked hesitantly after a moment, unsure as to how everything would fit together.

"What about her? You'll see her soon. Her name probably won't be Kaoru anymore, but most likely she'll look almost the same. Once again, it's a different body with different memories, but the vehicle is carrying the same passenger. I'm sure you'll notice similarities between your Kaoru, and who she is now."

"Okay listen closely, this is important! While most of the world has become fairly liberal, Japan is one of the main exceptions. They've gotten insane over the subject of sex, and public displays of affection. While kissing your girlfriend in public in America would be fairly natural, you'd get a lot of disapproving stares where you're going. Not to mention that they tend to be walking stress cases. They freak out about work and school very easily. Japan has had the highest rate of teenage suicide for exactly that reason for many years. Wakari de gozaru ka?"

"Hai de gozaru!"

"Dammit, I knew that you would say that! You gotta stop that!"

"Yare, yare..."

"There! Anyway, you may find modern Japan to be a royal pain, so I'm here to help you if you get yourself in trouble. If you have questions, just call for me, and I'll appear. So, do you feel ready to jump into the fray?"

"I suppose I'm as ready as I'll ever be. "

"Alright sweetie, your mom is going to wake you up to go to school. When you're all ready, I'll be waiting on your doorstep to walk you. I can't have my charge getting lost on his first day of school! See you in a few." Nicky waved a quick goodbye, and her image fizzled out of sight.

~*~*~

"Kevin! Kevin! Can't you hear your alarm clock? Wake up, or you'll be late for school! Kevin!"

That's right. Nicky said my name is Kevin now. It was Kenshin, but now it's Kevin. He pried himself out of bed, and looked at his mother, who was trying to shake him awake.

My reflexes are gone. Normally someone's presence would have brought me instantly awake. But I have a mother again... "Mom, I'm awake! I'll be up in a minute."

He certainly didn't sound like himself. He couldn't. That would be weird. Talking like he used to, now. He still had to sort out his

memories properly. He had to see how much of Kenshin was left. How much had the wish given, and how much had it taken? He supposed he would find out soon enough.

His mother had left the room, after placing his uniform on his dresser. Such a drab looking thing. Black with a high collar and brass buttons. At least it's cut well, a foreign piece of his brain added. It had matching black slacks, with no pleats in the front. Thank god, that same section added again. To part of him, the whole thing looked hopelessly foreign, the part that was used to a loose fitting keikogi and hakama. Those pants looked unforgivingly tight.

Scrubbing the sleep out of his eyes, he heaved himself out of bed, and promptly fell on the floor. Western bed, his brain supplied, not a futon. Bracing his forearms on the floor he pushed himself up, and made his way to his dresser, and dressed quickly. He ran his fingers through his hair, which was thankfully the same color, and a similar length, if not longer then before. He worked out the tangles that had developed from sleeping, and then tied it back at the nape of his neck. He needed to find a pair of socks. Check your dresser drawers, that new little voice in his brain supplied. After digging through a couple of them, he produced a pair of white socks. Not the tabi he was used to, but they would work.

The full-length mirror on his door showed him the new him. He was taller then before, but only by perhaps two inches. Most noticeably to him, and as Nicky had warned him, the cross-shaped scar that had been on his left cheek since he was fifteen years old was gone. He missed it for what it had meant, but he was secretly glad to have his perfect complexion back.

Since when have I been vain? He thought. It seemed a lot of Kevin had mixed itself into him already. He gave himself a quick look, before nodding firmly, and moving to retrieve his shoes from the closet.

It seemed Kevin had had a thing for shoes. He seemed to have something of every kind. The variety went from shiny, platformed, and animal printed to very drab and normal. He eyed one pair in particular; fuzzy leopard printed creepers (he somehow knew that was what they were called) with four-inch platforms, and swore they would never leave the closet again.

"Kevin! Hurry up!" His mother called up the stairs.

"Coming!" He called back down. Quickly pulling on a lone pair of beaten up running shoes, he grabbed what he assumed was his new book bag (but it looked more like a briefcase) and hurried down the stairs.

"I'm leaving!" he called as he ran out the door, and promptly tripped over Nicky, who was, as she had promised, sitting on his doorstep. He caught himself and actually managed to land somewhat gracefully.

Maybe all my reflexes aren't gone after all. The feeling of helplessness that had been steadily growing since he had woken up abated slightly with that comforting knowledge.

"Yo, asshole! You gonna apologize for getting me all dirty before we've even left for school, or what?" Nicky stood indignantly behind him, tapping her black booted foot impatiently.

"Gomen, Nicky-dono" He tried to sound sincere, but couldn't manage it properly. Nicky's posture and expression were so comical, that it was all he could do not to laugh.

Nicky harumphed loudly. "Apology accepted. But if you dono me again, I'm gonna hurl on your shoes, got it? People will look at you REALLY weird if you use that term now. I'm sure that if I puke on your shoes you'll learn quickly enough."

Kevin blinked in surprise. He desperately hoped that not all modern people were like Nicky. First of all, she was loud. Too loud. And she was far too blunt. He did understand what she was getting at though. Over-politeness would be taken as rudeness in the wrong situation. That was always the case, but it seemed more so now.

He followed Nicky all the way to school, simply because he had no idea where he was, or even what the school was called. He did however memorize everything on the way there for future reference. Some old habits die hard.

All too soon, they were in front of a large building, with an even larger gated yard. "Here we are, so let's get this over with."

~*~*~

Something about today felt different. Kaori wasn't sure why or what exactly it was that was different, if anything was at all.

But it sure felt that way.

The kendo club was getting new uniforms, but that wasn't a huge deal. It was cool that they had been able to raise the money, but still. This was even a different sort of different! It had nothing to do with the club. She did notice that she felt nervous for some reason. And the closer she got to school the more nervous she was. Was there a test she had forgotten to study for? Perhaps a report due, that had slipped her mind? She would be absolutely mortified if it was either of the two.

When she finally reached the school gates and walked through them, she felt a quick flash of something, not nervousness this time, but anticipation. And then it was gone, as quickly as it came. She found herself rearranging her school uniform, and checking her hair. As usual, nothing was out of place. The obvious red highlights in her long glossy black hair glinted in the sunlight. Something had told her not to wear it up today. It fell in a long fluid sweep to her waist, and was slightly wavy. It was her pride and joy.

Quickly she made her way to her classroom, and seated herself in her assigned seat; it was the row closest to the windows, and towards the back of the room. Most of the other students were already there, some milling about, some chatting with friends.

Immediately, one of the boys trotted up to her desk. "Hey Captain, have the new uniforms come in yet?"

She smiled at him. He was one of the newer members of the kendo club and hadn't even had a uniform yet. No wonder he was excited.

"Yeah, they came yesterday! I'll be handing them out at today's practice"

Several of the other boys in the room who were also part of the club overheard, and ran to her desk. Soon she had an animated throng chatting happily around her desk, not only of new uniforms, but also of upcoming tournaments and practices.

Kaori knew most of the girls in the school hated her. Even now, the looks tossed her way could wither small plants. She didn't care too terribly much about her clothes (as long as they matched and were clean), and she certainly didn't care about what they thought of her.

She heaved a sigh as the teacher came into the classroom. The guys clustered around her desk scattered like sheep being chased by a wolf.

The teacher waited for a few moments for the room to quiet, and then held up one hand for attention.

"Class, we have two transfer students today. This is Nicky Townsend-" A short girl with equally short and spiky blonde hair and huge green eyes waved brightly to no one in particular. "-and this is Kevin Hannah."

A slender boy of medium height with nearly waist length red hair tied back in a low ponytail stepped forward briefly as he was introduced. He smiled slightly as he nodded, his soft purple eyes earnest.

Kaori felt her heart stop in her chest as the boy stepped forward. This was a new feeling. Even in her most important tournaments her heart didn't skip beats.

There were several oohs and aahs at the two new people, mainly directed at them from their respective opposite sexes. The two girls who sat behind her were giggling madly.

The teacher harumphed loudly, before continuing. "Kevin is from America, so I expect everyone to be willing to help him out. Kaori-san, you were an excellent English student as I recall; why don't you go with Kevin to the library and begin tutoring him?"

She heard several female gasps of outrage, as she gathered her things. Making her way out the classroom door as quickly as possible, she stopped and waited patiently for the new boy, Kevin, to follow.

This was going to be an interesting day all right.

~*~*~ Chapter 3

"You can live your life lonely, heavy as stone Live your life learning, and working alone Say this is all you want, But I don't believe that it's true Because when you least expect it, Waiting

around the corner for you, Love comes quickly whatever you do"

The Pet Shop Boys, "Love Comes Quickly"

This boy...why did he seem so familiar to her? She found herself staring at him over the library table yet again, and had to consciously tell herself to stop. Although she was sure he had noticed, he didn't seem to mind too much. When he caught her, he would just smile sweetly and silently go back to his work.

It was weird that an American boy spoke and wrote so well in Japanese. When she questioned him about it he had blushed scarlet. He explained that a friend of his back home had collected anime and had insisted that he take Japanese with him at their old high school. Kaori had raised an eyebrow at that, but kept silent. Despite that bit of weirdness, they sat in companionable silence, with only an occasional question asked between them. The time seemed to pass more quickly than normal, and all too soon it was time to return to class.

They gathered their things, and made their way back to the classroom. Many of the girls glared at her as she walked in the door. She ignored them, and walked directly back to her seat and sat down.

She tried very hard to pay complete attention to her lessons, but she found herself sneaking glances at him again. She needed to stop that. She didn't need anymore dirty looks shot at her back. None of them would ever get into a physical fight with her- she was the captain of the Kendo club after all. She knew quite well how to use her bokken, but if it came down to it, she didn't really need it. Kaori sighed quietly to herself. She really didn't have the faintest clue why they didn't like her. It really didn't matter. Kaori forced herself to dive into her lesson and forget about everything else.

~*~*~

From his seat two rows away, Kevin let his eyes slide her way again. It was her, it had to be. She looked almost exactly the same, except for the bleached red highlights in her hair. And her name was Kaori. The names were so similar...

When he learned that she was the captain of the Kendo club, it only served to reinforce his impression.

When they had returned from the library, and re- entered the classroom, he was shocked to feel the distinct presence of fighting ki. He watched Kaori walk quietly to her desk, the eyes of many of the other girls in the classroom following her, and their expressions went from mild annoyance to bitter hatred. Whatever the case, it was obvious that Kaori was not well liked among her peers.

Kevin could only wonder why. Lost in thought, he almost jumped when the lunch bell rang. Almost. He was about to get out of his seat to talk to Kaori, when a crowd of his female classmates surrounded his desk. He listened politely to introductions, and equally politely, if even somewhat coolly, he declined offers of after school tea, and homework help. As he tried to escape it seemed that they only crowded closer, as if trying to imprison him.

He floundered helplessly in the throng for a few minutes, until Nicky stepped up, her eyes glowing weirdly.

"Excuse me girls, but he's coming with me!" Grabbing him by the arm, she jerked him out of the crowd. He found himself being carried off, out of the classroom and down the hall. As soon as they located a place that was somewhat empty, Nicky began the drilling.

"You didn't say anything weird to her did you?" Nicky instantly asked.

"No!" Nicky's accusing tone caught him off guard. "No, all she did was give me a bunch of books to study, explain them a bit, and then we came back to class. I didn't really get a chance to say anything."

"Well that's a start. Are you sure it's her?"

"I'm certain. She looks just like her, and her name is Kaori- too close to be a coincidence."

"I hope you're right. Makes my job that much easier for a change. I'm sure The Guy Upstairs is gonna throw us a few curve balls along the way, because that's just how It works. But so far so good! Did you learn anything else about her?"

"She's the captain of the Kendo Club. I guess she's the first female captain they've ever had."

"Are you going to join?" she asked pointedly.

"What?" Join? Why would he do that?

"Are you going to join the Kendo Club?" Nicky repeated, irritated.

"Why?" He asked, slightly confused.

Nicky smacked her forehead. "Because," Nicky began, her voice showing her frustration "you will be able to learn more about her, to help you determine if she is the one? Perhaps get to know her better, if she is?"

Kevin blinked for a moment before responding. "I hadn't thought of that!...That might be a really good idea. Would you mind if I asked you a question?"

"What's that?"

"When I first woke up this morning, my mom was standing over me. Normally if someone came within a 10 feet of me, my eyes would have snapped open. But when I walked back in the classroom I felt something very near fighting ki from some of the girls. If I didn't have my ability to sense ki this morning, why did it come back?"

"The body you now inhabit is getting used to having the instincts and reflexes of an ex-assassin suddenly dumped into it. I think that you may get some of your reflexes back, and it seems that even your ability to read ki is on its' way back as well. I doubt you'll get

ALL of your old abilities back. But I could be wrong. Think of it like a new computer trying to load old software. It's still trying to figure out what to do with it, before it can get anything running properly. Understand?" "Ano...Sort of." "Ack. I keep forgetting that... oh, nevermind. Everything is going as well as can be expected, and that's what matters. Lunch is almost over, let's get back to class."

~*~*~

The bell rang again, announcing the end of lunch. Kaori had watched the blonde girl, Nicky, drag Kevin unceremoniously out of the room and away from the crowd of disappointed girls loitering around his desk. And now they came back in, both of them returning quietly to their seats. Nicky appeared to be American as well, perhaps she knew him from before? Perhaps they were...? He was gorgeous, she admitted to herself. She would be upset if a bunch of girls were trying to ask her boyfriend out too. She normally didn't let herself think that way because of what had happened the last time...

Kaori shook her head sharply to clear her thoughts. Best not to think of that anymore. She was Kevin's tutor for two weeks tops, and after that, they'd probably never have any reason to talk ever again. She valued her solitude, and it looked like he was already taken.

Class passed quickly enough. She looked forward to the end of school so that she could hand out the new uniforms and get practice started.

Finally the bell rang signaling the end of school. She scooped her pens, binder, and schoolbooks quickly into her bag. Shouldering it quickly, she scooted out the door.

Halfway down the hall, a hand fell on her shoulder. She spun quickly around, surprised. Kevin. He smiled that same sweet smile.

"Would you mind if I came and watched you practice?" He inquired. He's interested in Kendo? It was probably just the obsession foreigners had with martial arts. And if his friend had gotten him into anime...Kaori rolled her eyes. Well, it couldn't hurt to let him watch, now could it?

"Sure. Come on, I have some things to do before practice, so we need to hurry." She didn't want too many people to see them together...

"I was wondering..." Kaori started as they hurried out to the gym.

"Yes?" Kevin inquired, following a bit behind her.

"Is Nicky-san your girlfriend?" Kevin stopped in his tracks, and stared after her for a moment.

She thinks Nicky and I...? How absurd. Well, how could she know? Kevin shook his head in amusement.

"What's so funny?" Kaori asked, turning around and cocking an eyebrow at his mirth.

"Dating Nicky would be like...dating my older sister. You don't need to worry." Kevin shook his head, one side of his mouth twitched up in a half smile.

"WORRY? Why would I worry?" Kaori snapped back at him. Kevin waved his hands placatingly in front of him.

"Calm down, I didn't mean it that way! I'm sorry." 'But I'm glad you took it that way...' he thought to himself. They must have had this same scene a million times before. If he wasn't sure of her identity before, he was positive now. She had reacted exactly how Kaoru used to when Megumi had flirted with him. A secret little smile settled itself inside him, and life seemed so much brighter then it ever had.

~*~*~

"So, what did you think?" Kaori asked him while she toweled the sweat of her recent workout off her face.

"I don't think I'm any good at it at all." Kevin looked at the shinai he held helplessly. He wasn't any good, -anymore-. He'd NEVER been good with a shinai, having only used them perhaps once or twice. Shishou had always had him train with the real thing. He had to remind himself that this body hadn't been trained as his other had. He'd been pretty bad when he first started under Hiko as well. Hiko had called him his baka deshi for a reason. But he had gotten better, he reminded himself. Much, much better. He didn't really need sword skills in this day and age, but if he was better it would comfort him a little. It had been a part of his life for so long...And according to Nicky, it had been that way in all his past lives as well. He reminded himself that his helpless feelings were a chosen state of mind. What he had to do was look at the potential for growth.

Kaori gave him a skeptical look "What do you mean, you're not any good? Everything I showed you, you did perfectly on your first try! I think you should join the club."

"You think so?"

"Yeah! If you learn everything this fast, you could be competing all over the country in a year! Are you -sure- you've never done this before?"

"I've never held anything remotely resembling a sword before in my life." The irony of that statement almost made him laugh. He'd never held a sword in -this- life.

"I can't believe that. Anyway, are you going to join?"

"Well, if you think I'm good enough..." He let his voice trail off.

"You're good enough. Or you will be soon. You're in. I'll order you a uniform as quickly as I can."

"Thanks! Um...I was wondering..." He went back over his earlier conversation with Nicky. As they'd headed back to class, she'd given him a few tips on modern dating. 'Kevin' knew most of it, but it was like he had to be - reminded- of it, for the information to be called

forth. 'Kevin' had done what he was about to do many times. 'Kevin' had had confidence in his good looks. 'Kenshin' had never cared.

"What is it?" Kaori smiled at him. He felt two of his most important organs turn to putty. One was his heart. He could go without blood for a few minutes. The other was his brain. That on the other hand...

"Well...I was kinda wondering if...if maybe...well, you know...if you might wanna go get a cup of coffee, or tea, or whatever it is you drink out here, or something. Yeah." He mentally shivered in disgust. Just put your foot in your mouth why don't you, a voice inserted sarcastically in his head.

Kaori's face froze. She shook her head, and bowed politely. "I'm sorry, I need to get home now. I have a lot of homework. I'll see you tomorrow at school." She practically ran as she turned the corner, and left his sight.

It was Kevin's turn to freeze; only his was in shock. He knew it wasn't the most brilliant thing he could have said, but it wasn't that bad! Or was it? Vague stirrings of panic fluttered through him, like dry autumn leaves rustling in the afternoon breeze.

"Oi, Hannah-san, your jaw is hanging open."

A boy his age, only shorter and wirier, stood next to him. Yoichiro. He was a member of the Kendo club, and one of the better ones. Kevin let his jaw snap shut, audibly so.

"What did you do, Hannah-san?"

"I didn't do anything. At least I don't think I did anything. If I did, I don't know what it was."

"You didn't ask Myoujin 'Ice Queen' Kaori out did you?"

" 'Ice Queen' ?"

"She had some major problems with an ex-boyfriend her freshman year. I'm not sure what he did to her, but I heard it was -bad-. Everytime someone asks her out, she always tells them that she has too much school work, and not enough time."

"Do you have any idea what happened?" Kevin asked tentatively.

Yoichiro cleared his throat, and spoke. "Well...I'm not sure of the details, but I know he was a lot older then her. Word was that she caught him in bed with another girl after he went away to college. When she broke up with him for it, he started to stalk her. Who knows what happened after that? It's none of my business anyway."

"That's...horrible!" Kevin burst out. He wanted to find that guy and hurt him. Dark tendrils of anger flared inside his gut, and swam around amidst his organs. It stirred the person he once was, even a lifetime away. Inside his mind he could almost feel the tattered soul of the assassin waking, one golden eye slowly sliding open. It

assessed the situation coldly, and decided it wasn't needed...yet. The eye slid closed once more, waiting.

"I agree. Which is why I understand why she turns everyone down. You might wanna just do yourself a favor, Hannah-san, and quit while you're ahead. She seems to think that she's found a great student in you. Be happy with that."

Yoichiro strode down the hall, in the same direction that Kaori had gone. A second later, he stuck his head back around the corner.

"You didn't hear that from me, got it? Last thing I need is a good beating -before- a tournament."

~*~*~ Some Notes: I've gone out of my way to make Kenshin/Kevin and Kaoru/Kaori seem sort of OOC. After all they are different people now, ne? ~*~*~

Chapter 4

"I can feel the discomfort in your seat, But in you head it's worse. There's a pain, a famine in your heart, An aching to be free... Can't you see? All love's luxuries are here for you and me"

Depche Mode, "Halo"

Kaori leaned up against the slippery tile of the shower, as the too hot water poured over her. It slicked her hair to her body and her face, before falling in a rush to the drain below. The noise of the water was comforting to her; it drowned out the sound of her sobs.

"Endless rain, fall on my heart, kokoro no kisuni, let me forget all of the hate, all of the sadness...*" she sang quietly to herself. This song always comforted her when nothing else could. Why did that boy upset her so much? But most of all, why did he seem so familiar to her? Normally when she turned a guy down for a date it wasn't anything to her. She was just protecting herself. But this time...

She felt like she had some kind of connection to him, as if he had been a very good friend from a long time ago. He looked hurt and confused as she had turned to leave, that expression somehow twisting a knife in her heart that she hadn't known was there.

She hated that expression. After getting away from him, she let herself cry, although she didn't really know why she was crying. Was it for her, or for Kevin?

She shouldn't be crying for herself anymore. Crying made her feel better, but it didn't really change anything. Nothing could change what had happened, especially not crying. She let herself sink into a ball, and the water ran over her. She stayed there until the hot water ran out, and turned ice cold.

The freezing water sent her sputtering out of the shower to the safety of a fluffy warm bath towel. After briskly drying herself and donning her robe, she padded barefoot down the hallway and returned to her room. Through her open window, the sky was lit dusky blue and

purple and was sprinkled with wayward clouds, still stained pink and red with the remnants of the sun. A few brave little stars had begun to peek out from under their soft night blanket, blinking their eyes sleepily as they prepared for their long night.

Such romantic metaphors, Kaori thought to herself. She didn't have time for anything like that. She had schoolwork, and she had Kendo practice, whether it be for Kendo club or for her family's old Kenjitsu school. Her parents sometimes swore that she was born with a bokken in her hand. That always made her smile.

Born for the sword... That made her think of Kevin again. He had taken to Kendo like ducks take to water. He swore that he'd had never held a sword of any kind- wooden or otherwise- in his life. But there was a faint smile behind that statement, as if there was more to it than he was saying. His grips, stances, and swings were all perfect. She had only had show him things once and he'd absorb them perfectly, as quickly as she could snap her fingers.

Later, she'd had him spar with one of the better members. Her first true shock came when she realized how fast he was. His only real problem was that he handled the shinai as though he was used to something heavier. What that something heavier would have been, she chose not speculate on. Besides that small over-balance, she'd think that he'd been practicing for years.

Kaori shook her head roughly to clear away such wayward thoughts. She had a long night of homework ahead of her and she needed to be able to concentrate.

~*~*~

Later that evening, Kevin sat cross-legged on the floor of his bedroom while a flustered and indignant Nicky ranted away from her perch on his bed.

"What did you do to make her scream and run away from you?" Nicky huffed indignantly. No wonder his master had called him baka deshi. He was dumb after all.

"She didn't scream!" Kevin replied hotly "She just...ran." He finished lamely.

"Oh so she just RAN, he says! When someone runs from you, that means that they are scared. You of ALL people should know what it means when people run from you. I'm sure people used to run from you all the time! Are you on crack?" She was so baffled she couldn't think of anything else to say.

After a moment of silence, she asked tiredly "What did you say to her?"

"I just asked her if she wanted to get coffee!" His voice rose in pitch defensively, and his reply came out almost as a squeak.

"And nothing else?" Nicky added, threateningly.

"No, nothing at all! However, one of the other guys from the Kendo club said that she got burned pretty bad by an ex-boyfriend."

"Well then, it might not be you, even as unsmooth as you are." Nicky stated dryly with one eyebrow arched nearly into her hairline. "And another thing! How can you wear those jeans?"

Kevin looked down at the pair of jeans he was wearing curiously. "What's wrong with them?" he asked innocently, his face quizzical.

"What's wrong with them? They're HUGE!!" Nicky spread her arms wide, as if to indicate their size.

Kevin smiled pleasantly at Nicky's pole-axed expression. "Wearing these raver jeans is like wearing a hakama again. They fit about the same."

Nicky plucked at the cuff, and pulled it taut around his ankle. "That's gotta be around 32 inches... I never thought of it that way. That's all completely beside the point, back to Kaori. What are we going to do?"

Kevin shook his head helplessly. "I really don't know. Just wait and hope for the best?"

"You know, I think that's all you can do at this point. Out-wait the enemy and all that rubbish. Anyway, my friend, I need to dematerialize for a while. Even Heavenly Guides need rest sometimes." She winked at him. "Don't worry sweetie, we'll figure something out. I haven't failed a mission yet!" With that, Nicky snapped her fingers and disappeared in a picturesque cloud of smoke. Kevin sighed, and lay back on his bedroom floor, his hands clasped beneath his head. Life was never easy, was it?

This whole thing was so strange to him. The entirely new world, and an entirely new life. Everything was so fascinating! Thanks to Kevin's memories he knew all about the world he lived in now, but that didn't steal the sense of wonder he felt.

Music. He needed thinking music. For some reason he seemed to function better now when there was music on. He examined his collection, amazed by its sheer size. Kevin hadn't just liked shoes. He liked CDs too. Most of it was 80's British pop, with some gothic dark wave and industrial peppering the mix. It was strange to think that all of this was -his-.

Kevin's clothes suited him just fine- big worn raver jeans, ancient and soft pairs of cotton and wool slacks in somber colors like gray, navy and black. All of the shirts were loose, some brightly colored, some not. It was his shoes he didn't like. After a careful inspection of the shoe collection, he discovered something wonderful- a pair of worn-in leather fisherman sandals, which you HAD to wear with socks. Right up his alley.

It was odd though; this time didn't seem as foreign as he thought it would. When he'd seen a car this morning he'd nearly jumped out of his skin. But on the way home he didn't even notice them at all.

He sighed and looked at his desk where his books were stacked. He had homework to do. He'd better get started, if he wanted to get to bed at a decent hour. But first he had to have music. Once again he examined his CD tower and settled on Once Upon a Time, by Siouxsie and

the Banshees. Time to start, Pre-Calc was waiting.

Only 20 minutes later a knock at his bedroom door interrupted him. His mother poked her head in and looked briefly around.

"Kevin, sweetie, what are you doing?"

"My Pre-Calc. This stuff is hard!" He threw his pencil down in frustration. "I need a calculator..."

"Kevin I didn't even know you knew how to do Calculus!" Shock was evident on his mother's pretty face.

Kevin looked at his mother. It was so wonderful to have a mother to worry about him. He didn't remember his other mother...she had died when he was very young. It was also nice to look at her, and see some of his own features. Currently her purple eyes, which were so like his, were etched with worry.

"So did you have a good day at school then?" Worry turned into surprise gradually.

"Yeah, actually I did. I joined the Kendo club, and I met this really pretty girl too. I asked her out, but she turned me down. I'm gonna keep trying though. Her name is Kaori, she's the kendo club's captain."

"Wow, sweetie, that's wonderful! I'm going to leave you to your homework. Study hard!" She gave him a thumbs up.

"I will, mom."

His mom shut the door, and walked slowly down the stairs to where her husband sat in his favorite leather chair watching TV in the family room.

"Honey, I just had a weird experience."

"What's that, Jenice?" Her husband asked without turning his eyes from the TV, the glare shining off his glasses in the dark.

"Kevin was doing his homework." Jenice replied, deadpan.

"He was actually doing homework? I wonder how badly they threatened him at school." Sarcasm dripped off the statement, like water off an oil-slicked surface.

"And he actually joined a school based athletic club too."

"That I don't believe."

"He did! Well, he told me he did. And he told me about a girl he was interested in too."

"KEVIN?? Interested in GIRLS? I never thought that would happen! I'll believe that when he brings her home, and we actually meet her."

"I'm willing to believe it, just because I've always wanted him to be normal. Not that there's anything wrong with being gay, but...."

"Well as long as he's actually doing his school work I'll support him in whatever else he does!"

"We can only hope for the best."

~*~*~

Later that night-

Myoujin Kaori slept, and in sleeping, dreamt. In her mind's eye, she saw a pretty red-haired man. He smiled at her, and did her laundry. He was a poor man, but was happy with his life. They all wanted to be like him.

They?

Yes, her and the rest of her family. None of them were related by blood, but they all were her family, regardless. Although everyone's faces blurred together, she felt the love there.

Who was this red-haired man and why did he stand out? It couldn't be simply that he was beautiful- although he most certainly was. His red hair was long and glossy; she was certain that it was as soft and fine as the hair babies had on their head's when they were born. His purple eyes were velvet soft too- and they were earnest in whatever they expressed, whether it be joy, sadness, or the most extreme anger-

*No, that wasn't right. When he was very angry, his eyes became the most frigid yellow- *

The only thing that marred his beauty, and kept him from looking completely feminine, was the harshly angular cross scar on his left cheek.

But that scar is gone now, and he is even more beautiful...

But he was dead- he died young, and he died with a smile on his face. She'd lived her life without him after that, and taking comfort in the serene smile that had been on his face when he'd left them. They'd taken his sword, which was as unique as he was, and enshrined it in the dojo. That way they could always feel him there-

It's still there, you know

She missed him so much. She still loved him as much as she had all those years ago-

Yes, you still love him don't you? Go and be with him, and tell him.

Yes, that sword was still in their dojo even after 120 years. There was a picture there as well, from when the founder of their dojo had taken them on a train to Yokahama-

How did I know that was where it was? How? HOW?

Kaori's eyes snapped open, and she looked around her room in

confusion. She was too far off the ground-

A bed, not a Futon

Her heart calmed slowly. Too slowly. Why was she scared? She was in her room, in her house, and nothing was out of place.

Then why does everything look different to me?

-Because it is different-

She briskly shook her head. This had to be her imagination. She was hearing voices. This couldn't be happening. She scrambled out of bed, and slid her feet clumsily into her slippers even while struggling hastily into her bathrobe.

She rushed through the old rice-paper hallways of her turn of the century house, and out to the walkway the led through the yard and into the dojo. Once there, she went to a small recess that had been built into the right wall.

There, sitting serenely on its stand, was that man's sword. She walked by this sword three or four times a day, and it had never seem particularly interesting before. Her father had once told her when she was small that as long as that sword was here, that this dojo and whoever lived here would always be safe.

Although she never had before, for some reason she believed him now.

And now as she knelt before it, she saw for the first time the small yellowed photograph that hung there. There were four people in it; one was a tall man with spiky hair who looked like he's just been poked in the rear with something sharp. Also there was a small boy, who's hair much resembled that of the tall man. Next to him sat a girl- no, a young woman- in what would have been a beautiful kimono. Her parents had often told her that she resembled this woman, Kamiya Kaoru, who had left this dojo to her great great grandfather, Moujin Yahiko, when she died. The photo was so old that she could hardly make out the floral pattern on the kimono. And next to her-

-Was that man. Scar, hair, sword, and all. He was smiling, and it was a sweet smile.

Where had she seen that smile before? Everything about this man was so familiar. Like she'd known him herself.

Behind the sword, and under the photo, was an urn. It held the ashes of the red-headed man. According to the antique dealers that her mother had taken them to, both the sword and the urn were worth a fortune. The sword was valuable not simply because it was old, but because of who this man was and because of who made it, but most especially because it was totally unique. The urn was valuable because of who made it- some famous reclusive potter who had lived on a secluded mountain outside Kyoto at the time- and also because of whose ashes it contained.

Kaori couldn't remember exactly why this sword was unique. She was sure she had been told, but at the time it hadn't seemed that important. It looked like every other katana she'd ever seen. It had

been just as well cared for as any other family heirloom might be. The shark skin that was used to make the grip was in perfect condition, and the saya shown from wood polish.

She felt like a thief as she reached forward to take the grip in one hand, the hard polished wood of the saya in her other. Lifting it carefully from its stand, she unsheathed it to inspect the blade.

A gasp escaped her, and left her lungs screaming for air that she couldn't draw. The sharp side was on the inner curve instead of the outer!

"Could I kill anyone with this?"

"The blade is on the wrong side! And there are no scratches- why, it's practically brand new!"

She let her gaze slid to the hilt. The hilt seemed to be a touch loose; maybe it's moorings had come loose from age?

"The loose hilt is why Shishou is alive- it allowed the blade to give just enough. If not, the ougi would have killed him, and possibly broken the sword."

Kaori looked at the sword in horror. It was -talking- to her! She quickly resheathed it and set it back on its stand. -Looking- at it wasn't too bad, but she didn't want to touch it again.

After long moments of looking at the strange sword-

Sakabatou

-She realized that there was a gap in her memory. She could recall almost everything about this man, but she couldn't remember his name! She was certain her father had told her multiple times, but she couldn't recall it to save her life.

She continued to stare at the sword in hope that it would somehow jog her memory. Eventually, Kaori simply shook her head, and got up to go back to bed.

Reaching forward to slide the old wooden door back on its runners, Kaori paused and turned to look back around the darkened dojo.

"If you must leave, will you at least tell me your name?"

"Kenshin. Himura Kenshin"

Frozen at the strange voices echoing eerily through the large room, her eyes moved hastily over the walls, and familiar wall hangings. There is no one here but you, she told herself, trying desperately not to lose the battle to remain calm.

She was losing. She'd only been this terrified once before in her life. The scream welled up in her throat, even while she tried to smother it. Eyes and fists clenched tight, she curled into a ball and leaned against the wall, and tried to take control of the situation again. After a moment, and a few deep breaths, she straightened up, and squared her shoulders. When no more strange voices floated out of the

old walls, she sighed and left the dojo, and hurried back to the relative safety of her bedroom.

* Endless Rain, by X-Japan

~*~*~ Chapter 5

Touch me, Touch- Was the heat too much? I thought I lost you from the start.

Time- Clock of the Heart, Culture Club

Kaori blinked her eyes sleepily at the mass of words in front of her. They sat in the library again, and she was currently trying to correct Kevin's homework. The characters swam together in dark puddles before her tired eyes.

Looking up briefly to clear her head, she saw the worry etched into Kevin's beautiful face.

Of course he's worried. He would never let anything happen to you.

She shook her head fiercely to clear the cobwebs, and tried to focus. She pointed out the mistakes she was conscious enough to catch, and let the minor ones she was sure were there but couldn't see stay hidden. "Did you have any problems with your other homework?" She asked wearily. Kaori felt her head starting to fall towards the table, but she caught it quickly enough not to hit her head.

Kevin shook his head. "Not really. Only the Pre-Calc was hard, but I figured that out. Kaori-san...are you okay?" She looked like she was ready to pass out, she'd nearly hit her head on the table a second ago.

"No, I'm fine! Really. I just didn't sleep that well last night...I had a really bad dream."

He was so concerned for her. His perfectly shaped eyebrows had drawn together, puckering his skin. His eyes were the most beautiful shade of purple, the kind of purple that she never believed that eyes could be. They seemed to be so deep and warm, almost like a hot spring... One moment she was drowning happily, and the next she was falling, the ground seeming to jump up from its stationary position. The world turned red, then yellow, and finally went mercifully black.

~*~*~

He hadn't been fast enough to catch her before she hit the floor. The thud of the side of her head forcefully striking the ground made something inside him squirm in panic. He snatched her up in his arms, hurriedly asked the Librarian the location of the infirmary, and shot out the door, as fast as this untrained and pathetically slow body could carry him.

He dodged around several curious students, and more than a few concerned teachers, before he had her resting comfortably in a small bed in the infirmary. All that remained now was to locate the school nurse.

"Hello young man. What seems to be the problem?"

Turning around quickly, he said "Thank god, you're here Sensei-" And his words abruptly left him. If not for the gold rimmed spectacles, and the modern clothing, he could swear he was looking at Megumi. She had the same glossy black hair, only it was braided loosely down her back. The same red lipstick that was always applied to perfection. He shook himself mentally. He could think about this later.

"Kaori-san hit her head." He continued lamely after a moment "I carried her here as fast as I could."

The doctor (he couldn't help but insert the name Megumi in his head) nodded earnestly before kneeling next to Kaori, and checking quickly for lumps. Just above Kaori's left temple, she found one- or the start of one. The doctor touched it gingerly, and Kaori winced, even in her blacked out state.

She nodded her head. "That's a good sign. That means that she's isn't out cold. The poor thing looks like she hasn't slept in a week! I really should try to wake her, but she probably needs rest more then anything else. She needs to go home." The doctor sat down at her desk, and pulled up Kaori's medical records on the computer, and made a few phone calls. Finally she replaced the receiver. She shook her head, and sighed.

"No one is home, and I can't get a hold of her parents at work either. She doesn't have any other numbers listed. Unfortunately I have to leave to go to another school for an assembly they are having, and I have to leave. Would you mind staying here with her until she wakes up? She'll need someone to walk her home when she comes to."

Kevin nodded solemnly, agreeing. "Okay, thanks. There are ice packs in the freezer. I'm late so I have to run." The nurse grabbed her briefcase and purse, and hurried out the door, shutting it quietly behind her.

He watched her leave in a swish of white cloth, and then turned back to Kaori. Her face was twisted in a vague grimace. A piece of his heart twanged at her expression. After a moment of simply watching her, he rose and moved to the freezer the nurse had indicated and retrieved an ice pack. Sweeping aside her raven hair as delicately as possible, he gingerly felt for the lump. Kaori winced once again in her unconscious state as his fingers brushed the area. Ever so carefully he braced the icepack against her head and the pillow, tilting her head to the side a little to balance it.

Straitening up again, he pulled the nurse's chair up to the bedside, and sat down to wait.

~*~*~

The first thing Kaori noticed as she woke up was the throbbing pain in her head. Then she noticed how -cold- that section of her head was. She moaned softly, and tried to open one eye. The light only made her head hurt worse, and she reached up to put an arm over her face, and accidentally brushed the bruised portion of her skull. Through another, much louder moan she heard the sound of blinds being drawn. Seeing the light decrease through her eyelids, she made

another attempt at opening her eyes, and found the light level far more pleasant the second time around.

She glanced around briefly, disoriented. She was in the infirmary, comfortably ensconced in bed, with a worried Kevin standing guard. He had pulled the nurse's chair up to the bedside, and was perched in an uncomfortable cross-legged position. She tried to sit up, and he swooped out of his seat, and gently pushed her back down.

"Don't sit up. You'll probably feel very dizzy and sick if you try. And although I would hold your hair back for you if you had to throw up, I don't think either of us would enjoy that much." His serious expression convinced her not to try it again.

She blinked a few times in the darkened room, and then asked quietly "Kevin? Why are you here? Where is the nurse?"

Kevin shook his head briefly and then explained "The nurse said that you probably had a light concussion. She couldn't get a hold of your parents, so I stayed to watch over you after the nurse left, until you woke up."

All she could manage in response was a slight nod. Any movement made her head hurt even more, if that was possible.

"Why did you do this for me?" She said quietly after a moment. "Why didn't you just go back to class? It wasn't your problem."

Kevin shrugged a bit and said, "I wanted to help. If I had hit my head like that, I hope someone would do the same thing for me." That silenced Kaori for a few moments.

This boy is genuinely kind, she thought after a moment. Nice guys are hard to find these days, she mused. His kindness even shone in his deep lavender eyes.

-Wait. Lavender eyes? Where had she seen purple eyes before?

Red hair and purple eyes. But no scar.

Recognition made her body go numb from shock. She knew where she had seen Kevin before. He looked like that man from her dream last night! What a strange coincidence. If he had that weird scar he would look just like him...

That scar was gone now, and he was even more beautiful...

If her head hadn't hurt so much she would have shook herself. She was hearing those strange voices again. She tried to pass it off as her blow to the head, but it wasn't quite working. The resemblance was eerie.

Kevin was looking at her strangely. "Are you alright?" he asked, his eyebrows knit together in concern. Her eyes had gone totally blank for a moment. If he hadn't seen her chest moving as she took her breaths, he almost would have thought her unconscious again.

She smiled a little as she spoke "Yes, thanks. I really appreciate you taking care of me and stuff. I'm sorry I was so rude to you yesterday. I just...avoid guys now."

She watched one of his eyebrows raise nearly into his hairline. "Oh? Is that so? Should I give up all hope?"

"That's not it at all!" She protested weakly. "I had a boyfriend once, my freshman year..." Kaori began, and then lapsed into silence. Kevin was watching her closely, waiting for her to continue, but as she opened her mouth to begin again, she found that she couldn't. "Gomen." She finished lamely. "It's hard for me to talk about."

Kaori could only wonder what had come over her to almost tell someone she barely knew about Shiro...

You trust him.

Why, she didn't know, but she did trust him. She wanted to tell him, but she just wasn't able to- *-Not yet*

But strangely enough, although she only met him yesterday, she knew this boy wouldn't hurt her ever, physically or mentally.

Like the other one did.

Kevin's eyes had turned sad, and almost wistful as she explained. One corner of his mouth had quirked up into a tiny smile. "I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable yesterday. I didn't mean to."

She reached out and took his hand in hers. "I know that. You didn't know. How could you have? Don't worry about it. Besides, you're different. You're actually a nice person."

His grin immediately widened. "Does that mean I get a chance anyway?" She couldn't help but smile and chuckle a bit over the innocent hope that expression held. Could she? Should she?

After a moment, and after he looked like he was beginning to despair of getting a positive answer, she smiled. "One date. You had better impress me if you want there to be a second one."

He squeezed her hand, and the flash of joy that traveled over his almost pretty face was amusing in its intensity. This boy made her smile a lot. She supposed that that could be taken as a good sign.

"Would the classic dinner and a movie work for you?" He asked, his grin nearly taking in his ears.

"Sounds great." She said with as much enthusiasm as she could, considering she had a minor concussion. Realized then that she was grinning like a maniac too, she tried to stifle it but found herself unsuccessful. They just sat there and grinned at each other like idiots, until the loud ringing of the school bell brought them back.

Smiling, Kevin asked, "Do you feel up to walking home yet? If so, I'll go get our stuff from the library."

Kaori nodded slightly trying once again to sit up. The wave of dizziness that attacked her wasn't nearly as bad as the first time.

Managing to get upright, she blinked a few times to clear her vision.

Seeing her falter, he stepped forward to help. Kaori waved him back, and said "I'm fine. Really. Please hurry and get our stuff so we can leave."

His face betraying his worry, Kevin nodded. "As long as you're sure."

Kaori found herself staring at the door many minutes after Kevin had left to retrieve their belongings. What was it about him? What was it? There was something there that she just couldn't put her finger on. She sighed deeply, and quieted her mind. She could think about all of this when she got home.

~*~*~ Chapter 6

Another night with open eyes, To late to sleep, to soon to rise
You're short of breath, is it a heart attack? Hot and feverish, you
face the fact- You're in love

Can You Forgive Her? by the Pet Shop Boys

Sleep evaded Kevin that night with frightening determination. He stared at his blank ceiling, thinking only two things- "Oh god she said yes, I have a date tomorrow night!" and "If I don't fall asleep now, I'm going to be a complete zombie at school tomorrow."

The first being most important to him, of course. He quietly watched the minutes on his alarm clock tick by, and the light slowly rise from the bottom of his window. Slowly his room filled with light, until it filtered through his blinds in a bright shaft, bits of sparkly dust swirling in the draft created by the air conditioning.

At 7:00 AM his alarm screamed for him to get up. He smacked it into silence, and went about what had become a morning ritual to him in only three days. Shower, blow dry his hair, put his clothes on, grab a bite of breakfast and a can of soda, head out the door to school, where he met Nicky. They then walked to school together and discussed how "The Plan" was proceeding. The good news he had for her granted him a bear hug, and a somewhat sloppy kiss on the cheek, along with an enthusiastic "Ganbatte yo!"

School zoomed by at light speed. His nervousness multiplied exponentially as the clock chimed each hour. Almost too soon, school was over, and he realized that there was Kendo practice today. Although he was new, and couldn't really afford to miss practice, he decided he needed to skip. He hoped Kaori wouldn't be mad.

The houses along the streets became a blur as he hurried home, recapturing some of his old speed in his urgency. When he realized that he was practically out- running cars, he slowed down. It would be embarrassing to get a speeding ticket on foot.

Once home, he attacked his closet with a frenzy. "Kevin" had tons of clothes... but, oh, WHAT to WEAR?? He got no further then choosing an appropriate pair of boxers before becoming frustrated and stocking down the stairs (in said boxers) to where his mother sat in the

kitchen working on some of her files.

His mother's eyes bugged out of her pretty head, as her nearly naked son plunked himself down unceremoniously at the kitchen table.

"Kevin, dear, what's the problem?" She asked, sensing something was wrong, but unsure as to what.

"I have absolutely nothing to wear!" He practically wailed.

Kevin's mother had been through this before. She wished the change she had been seeing in Kevin a safe trip where ever it decided to go, and brought her attention back to her semi-naked and wailing son. "Dear, you have more clothes then I do. That wasn't helpful. Okay, what's the occasion?"

"I have a date with Kaori tonight." He murmured miserably, as he smushed his face into the table "I want to impress her!"

Jenice tapped her manicured fingernail on the table for a moment. "Dinner? She inquired. "Somewhere nice?"

His face still squashed into the table, Kevin nodded.

She snapped her fingers. "Simple! Make a suit out of that black velvet jacket you have, and the velvet pants! With that button-down shirt I found you at that thrift shop, and your father's onyx cuff links, you'll be the best dressed guy in there. Do you still have that wonderful silk cravat?"

He stared at his mother in amazement. She had solved his problem in a second, when he'd been lamenting over it all day. It was so nice to have a mother again! As for the cravat...

"You mean the purple one?"

"That's the one! Now, go shower, get dressed and get back down here, then we can figure out what shoes you're going to wear."

He nodded mutely at his mother, before clambering up the stairs to follow her orders. An echoing shout of "Don't forget to deep condition you hair!" swept up the stairs as he entered the bathroom.

He eyed himself in the bathroom mirror, while slathering his hair up with Paul Mitchell Hair Repair Treatment. Kevin had kept himself in fairly good shape, although it had probably been out of vanity, as opposed to any concern for his health. He was somewhat muscular, but no where near as -defined- as he had been as Kenshin. Of course not, he thought ruefully, I haven't been struggling to keep Shishou from knocking me out every five minutes. Or hiding from and or assassinating government officials, and then practically starving to death for ten years he added to himself dryly. He let the conditioner soak into his hair for ten minutes before climbing into the shower.

Another ten minutes later, he stood in front of the mirror again, now toweling himself off. No scars, he thought, smiling to himself. Not on my body, not on my face. After mourning the loss of his cross scar

for the past two days, he had decided that he could live without it. His memory was working fine, and that's what mattered.

He had to admit he was enjoying being 17 again, and having no real worries, except what he was going to wear on his first date with Kaori, and getting his schoolwork done on time. This life was so different from his other one; this was pure luxury in comparison. He smiled softly at his reflection, and told it "I did deserves this." Selfish indeed, but truly, he had suffered. And now that a life of luxury and privilege had been handed to him on a pretty silver platter, he certainly wasn't about to tell The Powers That Be no.

Padding into his bedroom, towel clasped low on his hips, the boxers he'd chosen earlier clutched in his other hand, and he closed his door behind him. He let the towel fall into a shapeless heap, as he inspected his closet for the articles of clothing his mother had indicated. The "button down shirt" turned out to be a slightly shiny and lightly striped affair, but still very classy. It did need cuff links. Pulling his boxers on, he began his search for the velvet pants. Once locating those, he pulled them on as well, straightened his boxers, buttoning his shirt and tucking it in before fastening his pants. After quick trip downstairs to retrieve the cuff links, and to enlist his mother's help in fastening them, and he was back upstairs searching for that purple cravat. He spent the better part of ten minutes trying to tie it strait. Once it was properly in place, he threw the matching velvet coat over his shirt, buttoned yet another set of buttons, and tucked in his cravat. Looking over his reflection, he realized that something just didn't look right. He tapped faintly at his mirror trying to figure out what it was. When he'd bought the cravat...

It had come with a waistcoat! That's what was missing. Now where was it? He dug through his closet and all his drawers, and as always with his luck, it was in the very last drawer, and looking a tad wrinkled. But if I'm wearing it with a coat over it, no one will notice, he convinced himself.

The full-length mirror on his door revealed a very gothic, but still very classy looking person. Now the test: his mother.

Back downstairs he went, and once again found his mother in the kitchen. He did a little catwalk type turn, struck a pose, and said, "Well? How do I look?"

Her hands clasped in front of her chest she said dramatically, "You look how I've always thought Armand should!"

"Are you saying I look like one of Anne Rice's vampires?" He tried to keep the annoying screech out of his voice that seemed to show up when he was annoyed. Kevin hated it. He hoped fervently that he could mimic Kenshin's soothing mellow voice with practice. He would certainly give it a good try.

"Is there something wrong with looking like a beautiful immortal boy?"

Kevin sighed. "I suppose not." He didn't quite understand his mother's nearly occult obsession with Anne Rice, but to be compared to her favorite vampire was a compliment indeed. "Now, what shoes?"

Snapping her fingers again "That's easy! The Daljeets*." He thought again that he had entirely too many pairs of shoes, but at least the Daljeets were sort of normal looking. Patent leather they were, and also very expensive, but not as pointy as some creepers, and thankfully not platformed. The silver buckle would look good with his tie tack, and his cuff links.

The deep rumble of the garage door opening filtered through the wall clearly. His mother winked at him. "Maybe I can get your dad to let you take his Prelude." Kevin could only shake his head. His mother was being almost as nuts about this date as he was!

Presently, his father had come in, and had let out a low whistle. "Well, hello. What's the occasion?"

His mother nodded stupidly while speaking. "Kevin has a DATE. With a GIRL." He completely missed the significance of his date being with a girl, but his father smiled widely.

"Is that so? Going somewhere fancy? If not, you are now." He found five thousand yen deposited in his hand along with his father's prized, but never used, Platinum Visa. Kevin could only blink in surprise at his father's generosity.

He stared dumbly at the shiny plastic card in his hand, only to be spooked when he found a set of car keys dangling in front of his nose. "Take the Prelude, son. Be careful, the driver side is opposite, you have to shift with your left hand, and drive on the left side of the road. If you dent her, you'll never driver her again, and it will be out of your wallet to have the dent pulled out." Kevin winced a bit, but nodded dutifully. He headed back up to his room silently, not about to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Once in the safety of his bedroom again, he stared terrified at the shiny metal keys glinting almost evilly on his bedspread. He remembered how to drive...sort of. Plus with the differences of driver's side, and everything being in kilometers.... He sighed helplessly.

"Having doubts?" Nicky. Thank god. He was almost glad that she could appear and disappear at will where ever she chose.

"No, no doubts at all. Just..." He gestured briefly to the car keys.

Nicky grimaced. "When did you need to meet Kaori?"

Kevin looked at his wristwatch. "I still have an hour. Besides my hair still needs to dry." He snatched a hair tie off his dresser, and pulled his hair back into its customary low ponytail. "Hey, where have you been anyway? I've been at my wits' end trying to pick out clothing!"

Nicky waved one hand, basically indicating that she wasn't going to tell him. "Oh, here and there. Nothing to concern you, my pretty friend. Anyway, I'll give you a driving 101, if you would be so kind as to meet me in the garage in two minutes." Nicky disappeared into

her signature puff of smoke. He stuffed the money his father had given him, along with the credit card, into his wallet, and was happy to see his California Driver's License still safely tucked inside his wallet as well. He had known how to drive. 'He' had done it once; he could do it again. Just like if he really tried, he probably still perform most of Hiten Mitsurugi Ryu's special moves, with the exception of the ougi of course. Scooping up the car keys, he went to meet Nicky in the garage.

He spent a mere ten minutes remembering how to shift, and use the clutch properly. Another ten getting used to being on, what was for him, the passenger side of the car. And yet another ten getting used to driving on the wrong side of the road. But it only took him a few minutes to figure out how the stereo worked (His dad had a CD player in the dash. He was glad he remembered to grab a few CDs before leaving the house) Nicky merely patted him on the back, gave him a good luck hug, and disappeared again. He wanted to get to Kaori's early. He pulled up to the old dojo fifteen minutes early, his speakers blaring Erasure, and he felt on top of the world.

~*~*~ * For all you Non-Gothic people, Daljeet used to be a huge Gothic clothing store in San Francisco. They seemed to specialize in patent leather. Think of it as a designer brand of Gothic/Mod/Dark Wave people. Just as expensive too. *sighs, remembering her own pair of Daljeet creepers*

~*~*~ Chapter 7

You spin me right round, baby, right around
Like a record baby, right round, round, round

Dead or Alive You Spin Me Round

Kevin wasn't the only one who had trouble sleeping that night. Kaori also lay awake, her eyes focused intently on the ceiling. However, unlike Kevin, who was simply nervous, Kaori was experiencing full on panic.

Although she was safe, in her parent's house, in her own room, in her own bed, she couldn't help but feel terrified. What if what happened before, happened again? She thought. She carefully reminded herself that what HAD happened, had not been on their first date. It had happened after she had broke up with Shiro. And besides, Kevin didn't seem like the violent type...

There were a few things about Kevin that did scare her. First, he had long hair, like Shiro, and he wore it in a ponytail, only Shiro had worn it up higher. And Kevin's hair didn't look sharp like Shiro's had. Anything that reminded her of Shiro at all made her edgy.

The other thing that scared her was that eerie sense of familiarity she got whenever she saw Kevin. The fact that the redheaded man in her dreams looked just like him... she shivered involuntarily. She also felt strange whenever she walked past the sword in the dojo now. She had made the mistake of asking her father who that sword had belonged to. She felt she had to confirm her dream, and yet it scared her.

And her father HAD confirmed it. He had known the story from family history, as well as history books. It turned out that the sweet

looking red-headed man had been a famous assassin on the side of the Ishin Shishi during Bakumatsu, THE most famous assassin of that war in fact, Hitokiri Battousai. That was where recorded history stopped and family legend started. The man's true name had been Himura Kenshin, just as her dream had said. She had discovered from her father that after the war, he felt so bad about all the life he had taken that he'd given up his katana for a Sakabatou; that backwards bladed sword in the dojo; and had sworn never to kill again. He'd wandered for ten years, before meeting and saving the owner of the dojo at the time, Kamiya Kaoru. She had asked him to stay and he had.

During his two year stay at the dojo, they seemed to collect vagabonds- first, Myoujin Yahiko, her great great grandfather, who had been all of ten years old, and working for the local Yakuza. Then a streetfighter type, named Sagara Sanosuke, and Megumi Takani, who turned out to be from a family famous for their medical skills; Megumi had been no exception. When they found her, she had been making Opium for another local Yakuza branch.

Then, suddenly, one day, Himura Kenshin had just died in his sleep. No particular reason could be found- he hadn't been poisoned, and there were no signs of struggle or violence. In fact, he had died with a smile on his face.

Kamiya Kaoru had been hopelessly in love with him, regardless of the age difference, and after that she had lived to teach, never married, and died without an heir. She left the dojo to Yahiko, who had always been her best student, and his wife Tsubame, and the rest, as they say, is history.

And even stranger, now that she thought about it, she had known all that, without ever asking. Confirmation was what she had wanted, and that was what she had gotten. The fact that Kevin looked exactly like Kenshin had, simply without the scar, and had known precisely how to use that shinai the moment he'd picked it up made her think. Now if, in theory, there was a connection, as Kevin had handled the shinai like he was used to something heavier, that something heavier would be a sword. More specifically, a Katana, or perhaps even the Sakabatou.

Kaori mentally shook herself. Things like that NEVER happen in real life. She was just being overly romantic and paranoid, and combine that with lack of sleep, and a minor blow to the head, no wonder she was thinking strange things. What mattered was she had a date with this strange and gorgeous boy tomorrow night. What mattered was that her fear was completely out of habit, and yet she KNEW with a certainty, that her fear was completely unwarranted. If in fact, he had some connection to the ex-assassin who had once lived in her home, so long ago, she should feel completely safe, for if her second suspicion was correct, she had been Kamiya Kaoru. Kenshin had once sworn to protect Kaoru, and keep her from worrying about him.

If all this WAS true, who else could she have been? How else would she know these things? And if Kaoru had died still in love with Kenshin, wouldn't that explain her instant attraction to Kevin?

In the dark of her room, Kaori giggled softly. She was indeed a hopeless romantic. Lovers separated by death and reunited in the next life. It was almost cheesy. However all this what if-ing had calmed

her down considerably. Thinking that Kevin had been Kenshin, no matter how improbable that might be, took all her panic and nervousness away. Making her resolve firm, she decided two things; first, she would have fun on that date tomorrow. Second, she was going to go to sleep RIGHT NOW.

~*~*~

She spent her whole school day completely zoned out. Time and people passed by her without her knowledge. Once or twice, she had looked Kevin's way, and he had smiled, and nodded to her.

Of course none of this escaped the other girls in the classroom. They all glared at her back, and although she felt it, she staunchly ignored them. To her, most of her female classmates were weak and simpering. It would make her life easier if they liked her, but she didn't particularly mind that they didn't either. She suspected now, that it was her strange appeal to her male peers, (she didn't understand it either) that made them hate her. So, because she knew that she couldn't change anyone's minds, whether they be male or female, she just ignored them. What else could she do?

Other than that, school passed quickly, and uneventfully. She had put up a notice earlier that morning that Kendo practice was canceled. After school, as she walked out the gate, she watched Kevin haul ass (that was the only way she could describe it) down the street in what she assumed was the direction of his house. She giggled to herself as she watched him and his cloud of dust disappear, and thought that she had been giggling a lot lately. Shaking her head in self-annoyance, a wry smile graced her mouth. She wasn't about to let herself become a simpering female, a quality she disliked in anyone, especially herself.

She walked home at a comfortable pace. When she got there, she sat down and ate a few crackers and had a glass of iced tea. She relaxed for a bit, then glanced at the kitchen wall clock- 5:00PM. She padded up the stairs, and into her bathroom, stopping briefly to snatch her bathrobe off her inside doorknob. Turning on the tap, she ran herself a hot bath, and poured a bit of a scented oil into her bath water. Relaxing completely in the hot aromatic water, she let go of the last of her nervousness with the help of a long history in meditation.

After her soak, she toweled off, and headed back in her bedroom. Kevin hadn't said if they were going somewhere nice or not. She hoped they were, because she planned to dress nice; in fact she was going to wear the only dress she owned. She had bought it a long time ago to wear to a Senior dance with Shiro that they had never gone to. It was a black satin affair, but not too short nor too skimpy. It had wide shoulder straps and a moderate square cut neckline. It fell to just above her knee, and was cut to be form fitting, and yet concealing at the same time. It had a small slit up one side of the skirt, but neither did the slit go up very high; it was just enough to keep the skirt from impeding her walking.

However, she had grown since she had bought it two years ago, and both her bust and her hips were larger, making a not-so-skimpy dress look a little slinkier than it should have been. However the effect was not unpleasing; it still appeared to be rather modest. If anything it complemented her figure more, and made her waist look

tiny.

And now to accessorize! She threw a black cardigan over her dress and left it unbuttoned, with the addition of a pair of small silver hoop earrings, and a short silver necklace, she completed her outfit. Simple yet classy. Perfect. Pulling her hair up high on her head, she tied a long, wide black ribbon in it, and let the ends trail into her hair.

Kaori was putting the finishing touches on her hair, when she heard a car pull up. She glanced out the window, and got a bit of a shock. She watched Kevin step out of a car, and a rather nice one at that, and start up the path to the house's front door. Kevin's family could afford that car? She winced a little as she thought how much that fancy little Honda he was driving had cost. That Kevin even knew how to drive...

She hurriedly applied a bit of gloss to her lips, and checked her reflection again. Perfect. Just then the doorbell chimed. She padded down the stairs, to find her poor mother gapping at Kevin. She didn't blame her. Kevin looked like something out of an American movie, to be sure. Although his suit was all of a modern cut, he still looked terribly old fashioned, and yet...She tore her eyes away, and looked at her mother, who was still gaping. Kaori only shook her head, grabbed her coat, and sat down to fasten on her heels.

They were about to step out the door when her mother recovered herself. "Stop right there! I need pictures!" She scurried down the hall and returned a few moments later with a camera. After arranging the poor couple till they were practically hanging on each other, she snapped a picture and scurried off once again. Kevin could only shake his head.

"What is it with parents today?" He whispered loud enough for Kaori to hear.

"Yours too?" She thought that just her parents were going batty today.

Kevin nodded earnestly. "Oh yeah. When mom told dad that I had a date, suddenly I had car keys and a credit card in my hand." He shook his head. "And now you see, my mother has me dressed up like a vampire."

"It looks great." Kaori said helplessly, now a little worried. He was right, he did look downright vampiric. That scared her just a little.

"You look better." He immediately shot back. It was true- she didn't need the fancy clothes to look beautiful. She'd look gorgeous in a burlap sack, naked, or in Versace. It just didn't matter.

A faint blush had stained across Kaori's cheekbones. Although she knew he was trying to stifle it, Kevin had a "Forget dinner, can I have you instead?" sort of look in his eyes. Although it made her nervous again, it also made her insides jumble pleasantly and feel warm in just the right places. Kevin was certainly a vision himself. He exuded glamour, as incense gave off smoke. Although he was not very tall, all the black made him seem so; combined with his natural slenderness, and his posture... well it wasn't helping her jumbling

insides at all. He was fairly broad-shouldered, and the cut of his jacket even made him seem more so, and he stood with his hips pressed forward, hands in pockets. All of that, added to his brilliantly glossy red hair, and deep purple eyes...she felt like she was dating some kind of model or movie star.

She must have been silent for quite a while, or perhaps she was starring something awful, but briefly he looked confused. "Kaori-san, is something wrong?" He asked, the now familiar expression of worry etching itself onto his face, making his eyebrows draw together, and the skin around his eyes pucker slightly.

She gave herself a mental kick in the butt, before replying "No, nothing is wrong at all!" She punctuated that statement with a brilliant smile; "Well, I think my mother is done fawning over us, shall we get going before she decides she wants more pictures?"

This instantly wiped the worry of Kevin's face, and he gave a low chuckle. "Good idea. Hey, turns out while I was getting dressed my mother made reservations at some Italian restaurant called Biba's. Have you heard of it? Do you know where it is, because I sure don't."

A surprised gasp escaped Kaori's lips. "Reservations at Biba's? I wonder how she managed to do that! That's one of the most expensive restaurants in town, and it's ALWAYS packed. And, yeah, I know where it is. Let's go before they give our table away."

"They wouldn't really do that would they?" Worry worked its way back into Kevin voice and face.

"They've done it before; they did it to my parent's on their anniversary."

"Then we are leaving NOW." Kevin gently took hold of Kaori's arm, and steered her out the door. Upon reaching the car, he opened the door for her, and held it until all her limbs were safely tucked inside. After climbing inside himself, he looked over to find Kaori shifting nervously. "A bit like a cockpit, isn't it?" he asked with a grin. "Please keep hands and feet inside the vehicle until we have to come a complete stop. Thank you and enjoy your ride." He said jokingly in his best announcer-esque voice. Kaori put a hand over her face and tried to stifle a giggle. It didn't work.

The car came to life as soon as he turned the key in the ignition. Since this was a sporty car, Kaori had expected it to roar to life with all the ferocity of a hungry lion. Instead it was very quiet; in fact it purred very softly. Kevin punched a button on the dash and music blared into the small car. He quickly turned down the volume; he didn't want to deafen her.

On the way to the restaurant, Kevin amused her by trying to sing the lyrics from his Erasme CD in Japanese; he failed miserably, not in translation, but in making the words fit. Knowing he sounded ridiculous, he switched back to English. According to her, she understood English just fine, and had been one of her favorite subjects in school. And so he picked a song in particular:

"Angel made in Heaven, Oh, my one and true love, Give me some of that

action, reaction Angel made in Heaven Only one and true love, Gimme some of that action!"*

Kaori understood the content of the song perfectly. She wondered if he had picked this one out to get a message across.

"Arrow in my heart, we were meant to be I knew it was my name you were calling Celebration: now your standing next to me Show love and emotion, I'm falling!"

She chose to ignore that verse, and everything it could have meant. Now she wasn't sure if she was being a hopeless romantic, or just being paranoid. If she wasn't reading meaning into things that weren't there, why would he want her to love him? Unless...

Unless her suspicions were correct. She couldn't think about it anymore now, however. They had pulled up in front of the restrant, and Kevin was stepping out, and was handing a liveried valet his keys. Yes, there was plenty of time to think about this later. Right now, she had promised herself she'd have fun, and she was going to keep that promise.

~*~*~ Chapter 8

"I don't want to start any blasphemous rumours, But I think that God's got a sick sense of humour, And when I die, I expect to find him laughing."

Depche Mode, "Blasphemous Rumours"

"Nicky."

Nicky shifted in her regenerative state. She had tired herself out earlier when she had re-taught Kevin to drive.

"Nicky! Wake up!" the voice came, far more insistent this time.

One eye opened drowsily to find an annoyed heavenly ruler standing over her. Bounding to her feet, she straitened her clothes and checked to see that she was properly materialized.

The being nodded sharply. "That's better. You haven't reported to me once since you started this mission. I shouldn't have to come find you myself. Report. NOW."

Nicky snapped her heels together and saluted smartly, her skirt swishing around her legs with the quick movement. "Yes, your Majesty!! My mission objective was to help Himura Kenshin, in his reincarnated state as Kevin Hannah, to find the reincarnated Kamiya Kaoru, thought and confirmed to Myoujin Kaori, and fulfill his wish to be with her romantically. The purpose of his wish was for there to be a more peaceful time and place where their relationship would not be interrupted."

"My current mission status is as follows," Nicky continued formally, "Kevin is out on a date with Kaori, and appears to be doing fine in the modern world. Something that was not part of his wish, but was an added bonus was his age reduction to one nearly Kaori's own. I believe it makes him more comfortable around her."

The heavenly ruler nodded slowly. "So everything is working out perfectly for him then?"

"Yes, Your Highness. He is adapting fine. That is the end of my report."

The attractive androgynous face of the being that ruled Heaven twisted into frightenly evil smile. "Good. Time to throw a kink in the plot. I can't let him have it that easy."

Nicky felt shock take her. "But...I thought you were going to give him a break!" Her hands balled into fists, fingernails digging painfully into her palms. "I thought he was one of your favorites!"

The smile on God's face only widened and it shrugged its shoulders. "So I lied. And he's one of my favorites to PLAY with. You've worked for me for a long time Nicky, you should know me better by now."

Closing her eyes tightly, she tried to press back the tears. She had worked so hard to make sure nothing went wrong this time. For once she had managed to do her job perfectly. However, she understood the nature of things now. God did not care if she actually completed her mission. It only wanted to watch the troubles she and her human charges suffered as they tried! Despite her best efforts, the hot tears poured down her cheeks. Poor Kevin. And he was so happy! He deserved it! Nicky took a deep gulping breath to calm herself, her large green eyes seeming all the larger magnified by tears, and after a moment she spoke.

"With all due respect Your Majesty, I believe that you should take pity on him, and let him rest and enjoy himself for a lifetime." Nicky's head was inclined. She was really pushing her luck now.

God's eyes narrowed sharply. "If I cared what you, a simple heavenly guide, thought of how I go about my business, I would have had you appointed to the Council long ago. Remember your place!"

Nicky raised her head and matched God's hard stare. "Forgive me, Your Highness. I've overstepped." She tried to keep the sarcasm from dripping off her words, but still a hint remained. "May I ask what you have in store for him, that I may prepare more sufficiently?"

She heard God scoff, and raised her head again. "Of course not. It won't be very interesting to watch if you are prepared." With a curt wave of it's hand, God banished Nicky back to her earthly state.

~*~*~

All he could do was watch intently as she picked through her food. Even the way she pushed the food around on her plate...And so he stared, his own plate of pollo marsala* forgotten long ago.

Kaori wasn't really eating either. She was literally pushing her food from one side of the plate to the other. How could she possibly eat when Kevin was staring at her THAT WAY?? At school he was okay,

because he had to wear that same all consuming uniform that all the other boys did. School uniforms are never flattering. However, now seeing him outside of school, he dressed and carried himself completely different. And he always stood hands in pockets, his hips pressed forward, causing his back to bow in such a way... She mentally shook herself. Her insides hadn't stopped their gymnastics either. In fact they must be getting a really good workout, because she was warm, almost sweating. She knew very well what this feeling was; it had been there with Shiro, but was so very pitifully small compared to this.

Kevin had leaned forward, elbows on the table, his hands forming a bridge to support his chin. "You've stopped eating."

Kaori jumped, and couldn't stifle her nervous laughter. "Well of course I've stopped eating! You're staring at me! And your not eating either."

A tiny grin sneaked onto Kevin's face. "I'm not staring. I am admiring. If you want me to, I'll stop." A hint of something he wasn't aware of had sneaked into his voice, but Kaori picked it up clearly.

"You are staring!" Kaori insisted. "Your eyes say you'd rather have ME for dinner then your food!" She wasn't sure she was comfortable with where this was going. She was far too attracted to this boy for her own safety, and obviously the feeling was more then mutual.

Instantly, his eyes changed, from the warmth that was making her squirm in her chair, to sadness. The purple, which had acquired an alarming pink tinge in the last half- hour, became a deep blue, as the pink tinge left them. His head lowered, and cocked to the side, allowing her nothing but the view of an eyelid, and eyelashes. "I'm sorry. I've made you uncomfortable..." He flagged the nearest waiter, and flashed his father's credit card, calling for his check.

He kept forgetting that this wasn't Kaoru in front of him. Well it was her, but it wasn't. This person had had something awful happen to her at the hands of someone she had loved. But persons' ki could only tell you so much. Currently it was telling him things he was sure she wouldn't want him to know. She was fairly glowing with sexual energy, and she was obviously uncomfortable with the feeling. He understood, because if bad stuff went down with her ex, then of course she would be uncomfortable. All he could do was mentally kick himself, and apologize. Sometimes he wished that THAT ability had stayed gone.

Although...he wasn't quite used to this kind of tension either. After he'd gone on his journey, part of his penance had been abstinence. So when Kaoru had flirted, he'd ignored it. He sighed as they brought him the check, and he tucked the card inside, and the waiter went to scan it. He looked back up at Kaori then, to find her eyes shining with tears.

"Oh no..." he reached forward across the table to take one of her hands. "Please, don't feel like you've done anything wrong! You haven't. I've made you uncomfortable, so it's my fault." Something about this only made the tears rise faster and they now threatened to spill over.

How could anyone be so nice? He had to be the sweetest person she'd ever met. He said it was his fault when it wasn't. It was all her. She shouldn't be uncomfortable, after so long. Perhaps it wasn't the feeling itself, just it's intensity? That was something she'd just have to figure out. But she wasn't going to let herself cry in the restaurant. She'd wait until they left...or at least she was going to try.

He'd gotten his dad's credit card back, and now they could leave. He offered Kaori his hand, and she stood up, and let him lead her out of the restaurant. The valet retrieved the car, and he made a quick survey for new dents; his dad would kill him if there were. Luckily there were none, so they could leave. Once in the car, he turned the music back on, but quietly, and put in something less bouncy than Erasure. He figured London Suede would fit the mood better.

She seemed to be calming down a little, but he didn't want to risk it. He pulled the Prelude into a fairly empty parking lot, and parked the car under a light.

Kevin turned in his seat to look at her. "Do you want to talk about it?" He asked gently.

Shaking her head, Kaori whispered, "I don't think I could explain it to you. It's strange..."She paused for a moment, searching for the words. Telling him of her odd theory was out of the question, as was talking about Shiro. "Part of it DOES have to do with...what happened last time. But...I feel like I've met you before. Like I've known you for a long, long time. That's what confuses me most."

A little bit of shock followed by a lot of elation filtered through Kevin's brain as her words sunk in. That was definitely a good start! Maybe in time, she would remember WHERE she knew him from. When or if she did... everything would be perfect.

Kaori glanced up then, to see what Kevin's face could tell her. He looked strangely happy at what she had said. Perhaps he felt it too? No...that would be too weird...and further confirm her odd theory of reincarnation.

But did she really want it to be confirmed? It was one thing to find out her dreams were in fact events, but to really discover that by chance you are dating a person you loved in a previous life...that would point to order in the universe that just couldn't be there. Perhaps she had developed a bad case of pessimism since Shiro, but people just DON'T get that lucky.

But, what if they did? Was it really so hard to believe? She looked back up at Kevin, his concerned face looking at her, waiting patiently for her to continue her explanation. They were so comfortable with each other; it almost felt like they had been together for a long time. Kevin was certainly different from most guys. Anyone else would have taken her home and never talked to her again, if she had started crying in a restaurant like that. The next morning everyone in school everyone would know how 'weird' she was. Instead, he had taken her somewhere quiet, and asked if she wanted to talk about it.

Quite suddenly, she realized something. She WANTED it to be true. She

wanted to believe that something out there, whether it was God or whatever anyone wanted to call it, could be kind enough to give the love of her life back to her. She glanced up at Kevin again. The love of her life? Kenshin had been the love of Kaoru's life. And she wanted to believe, so she would believe.

"Kaori-san...Are you okay?" She had been silent for a long time, as if lost deeply in thought. Every once in a while she'd look up at him and smile just a little bit, like she was remembering something from a long time ago. It took a while for his question to reach her. She looked up and smiled again.

"Yeah. I'm okay. I may be better off now than I've ever been. " Her smile widened as she spoke. "I was wondering...I hope I don't sound dumb...but do you believe in fate?"

~*~*~

Kevin parked the Prelude in his garage, and sat back in the cockpit style seat. When she had smiled at him and asked him if he believed in fate, his heart had nearly stopped. He almost couldn't breath. She hadn't explained the elusive comment, but he had a feeling parts of Kaoru were coming back to her. They were probably only vague impressions of half-forgotten feelings, but it seemed to be enough. They didn't end up going to a movie, but had sat in the car and talked for an hour and a half.

Their date hadn't been what he'd expected, but he felt that it had turned out BETTER. When he'd dropped her off, he'd gotten out to open the car door for her, and walked her to the gate that still lined the yards of the old dojo.

"Do you mind if I kiss you goodnight?" He'd asked, knowing very well that it might not be okay; he still had no idea what had happened with her ex, in fact she wouldn't even say his name out loud. That subject had been completely avoided during their talk in the car.

She'd blushed darkly, and in the glaring light of the street lamp he could see her nose and her cheekbones stained a vivid shade of pink. He almost thought she was going to say no, but after a moment she nodded her assent.

Once again, he'd felt his heart skip, and his breathing halt. Not even daring to put his arms around her, although he would desperately love to do so, he'd merely taken her hands and pressed a soft, chaste kiss to her mouth, only lingering slightly. After a whispered goodnight, he watched her walk inside, before climbing into the car, and driving home.

He heaved a contented sigh, and pulled the keys out of the ignition. He locked up the car, and went in through the door that led into the kitchen, to find both his mother and father waiting up for him.

He proudly held out the car keys to his father. "No dents!" he proclaimed happily. "I told the valet that I would kill him if there were any." His father nodded, and took the keys from him.

"Kevin." his mother said seriously. "How did it go?"

"Perfect. Great. Better than perfect." Heaving yet another contented sigh, he fell into one of the kitchen table chairs.

"Did ya kiss her?" His parents said in unison as they leaned forward over the table expectantly.

Kevin drew himself up, and tried to look insulted, but couldn't pull it off. He was secretly too proud of himself for it to work. "Maybe." Was all he said, shooting his parents a sidelong glance through narrowed eyes.

His parents smiled at each other. "He kissed her." His dad said though a large grin.

"He certainly did." His mother replied through an equally large grin. All of a sudden though, she went serious. "Kevin, we have a piece of news for you."

He perked up again. News? That didn't sound good. "What kind of news?" He asked, worry creeping into his voice.

His parents shot each other unreadable glances, before his mother continued. "That depends. Remember that tall guy with the brown hair you were dating when we moved? He called tonight. He's coming with his father on a business trip over here. He said he wanted to see you while he was here."

Kevin felt his night go from wonderful to horrid in two seconds flat. This was a part of "Kevin's" memories that he hadn't paid attention to. It seemed he'd overlooked something quite important. How was he going to explain -this- to Kaori? He could only hope she was liberal.

Silent, he left the kitchen table, and headed up the stairs. His parents watched him disappear with worried looks etched into both their faces.

"Do you think now is a bad time to ask for my credit card back?" His father whispered.

Jenice could only look at her husband in amazement. "Yes. I think this is a very bad time. Ask for it in the morning. I don't think I should have given that boy our address. Oh well, it's too late now."

~*~*~

Kevin wandered up the stairs to his bedroom in a daze. "That boy I was dating..." he said quietly to himself, as he opened his bedroom door. He was too shocked even to panic.

He stepped into his bedroom to find a bawling Nicky sitting on his bed. Momentarily forgetting his own problem, he tried to understand Nicky through her hiccups.

"Kevin!" She exclaimed. "I have some *hiccup* bad news. God called me in for a report. *hiccup* When it heard how well you were doing, *hiccup* it decided it was time to play with your life again! I tried to talk it out of it, but it wouldn't listen to me! I'm so sorry, I tried, I really did!"

Oh. Well that explained things, now didn't it?

~*~*~ Author's Notes: I wanted to apologize for taking so long to write this chapter. I also wanted to thank Miyu for flattering me, and Sakka-chan for curing my writer's block. Even more thanks to Miss Led; she is a big part of why this is readable ^_^

~*~*~

Chapter 9 "How can I explain, When there are few words I can choose? How can I explain, When words get broken? Erasure, Chains of Love A tall boy, very obviously foreign to the neighborhood, and in fact, the country, stood calmly outside the high school gates. Female students looked at him for a moment in awe, before scurrying away, suddenly frightened.

Until you looked at him closely, this boy seemed much older than his 18 years, much older indeed. It was impossible to tell if it was from the hard-bitten experiences of a childhood gone awry, or if that was simply the way he was.

He was very tall, easily over 6 feet, his spiky hair a shiny dark brown, except for the long bits that fell over his forehead and into his eyes. Those had been bleached to a very contrasting white. The rest of his hair had been ratted out, and coated in hairspray until it stood up nearly straight. His clothing was just as outrageous as his height and his hair. He wore a pair of black riding breeches, the kind that ballooned out on the side, and over them was a pair of knee-high black boots that had been straight-laced skin-tight. The domed toe announced a steel plate hidden under the thick leather. Thick creamy lace was sewn to the cuffs and collar of his poet shirt, and from his neck and wrists jingled the distinctive presence of a bondage collar, and matching bracelets.

The high school students walking past him on their way home could only stare. The closest thing to this they had seen was a J-rocker, but this boy lacked the shiny/glitteriness they tended to have.

The boy finally noticed the crowd of curious students gathering a respectful distance from him. Through his hair, they all saw his eyes slide their way, and his gaze held the thinly veiled threat of violence. The crowd scattered quickly, and no one stopped to stare after that. ~*~*~ Kevin felt a disgusting amount of pride as he and Kaori walked through the halls to the exit. As they left the classroom, she's taken his hand, and smiled. He been shocked for a moment; he'd thought she wouldn't want anyone to know, especially all the boys she'd turned down. He was happy to see he'd been wrong.

He simply couldn't believe his luck. It had almost been too easy. And now as they walked down the hall, many angry and envious stares beat against their backs. Sometimes he was glad that he had gotten back some of his ki reading ability; like now, there was no fighting ki floating around. Just envy. And other times, like their date, he just didn't need to know.

They walked out the large double doors that led to the huge expanse of lawn that graced the front of the school. As they stepped out, almost on cue, a tall boy stepped from behind the high plaster wall that lined the lawn, and in through the gates.

Panic stitched itself in Kevin's stomach, and crawled through his veins, making his body go numb, and begin to tingle. *HIM* That spiky brown hair was unmistakable, and if not that, the slanted brown eyes, even lined in kohl, certainly were. Currently, they were narrowed dangerously at the girl on his arm.

The recognition had hit him on two levels. The part of him that was Kenshin still recognized the exterior to be that of Sanosuke, while Kevin saw only an ex-boyfriend he had never expected to see again.

Kaori felt Kevin stop. It was so sudden she almost didn't stop walking. She also felt Kevin self-consciously pull his hand out of hers. Shock was quickly replaced by a deep hurt she couldn't explain. As if something she had worked very hard for was being cheerfully taken away. She felt that withdrawal as easily as she handled her bokken.

That was when Kaori noticed the tall boy standing far down the path to the gate. A strange looking character indeed, his clothing so foreign as to be unplaceable to her. His glossy brown hair stood on end as if he had put his hand in an electric socket. And yet...somehow, he looked familiar, similar to how Kevin had looked familiar to her, only there was a different sentiment attached to this one. The actual boy in front of her sparked a touch of fear, but the feeling his memory gave her was one of long friendship, and protection. The memory told her not to worry; the boy in front of her told her to run.

She looked from the tall boy back to Kevin. His face showed a panic she'd never expected. Did this tall boy come to hurt him? Kevin was fairly small and slender. He didn't look like he would do well in a fight with someone that large.

He won last time, why should this be different?

Damn! She was hearing those voices again! She still didn't know what they were, or what part of her brain they came from, but so far they had never lied to her.

Striding confidently down the path, the tall brown haired boy came towards them, and he came to a stop some ten feet from them.

"So Kevin, who's your bitch?" Kaori didn't recognize the English word bitch, but Kevin's eyes and face hardened to that of a stone figure. She knew from the rest of the sentence that he was referring to her, and from the look on Kevin's face, the word must have been something derogatory.

"My parents told me you were coming. I hoped they had lied to me. You haven't changed at all have you? But then I haven't been gone very long either." Kevin ground out the English words; his teeth bared in what would almost be a feral snarl. Kaori had never seen Kevin like this, had never thought his face could become so frightening.

--But when he was angry, his eyes became the most chilling yellow...

After her brain's last wayward interjection, she couldn't help but look over, and wonder if Kevin's eyes had indeed turned yellow. She had seen them change color before. After looking, she quickly turned her head back, and looked at the concrete with a great deal of interest. Perhaps her imagination was overactive but she could swear she could almost see the yellow-gold flecks gathering and multiplying in his normally purple irises.

Kevin tore his eyes away from the tall boy, and back to his new girlfriend. He could sense the confusion and fright wafting off her. He took one of her hands again, and with his other, he raised her chin so she would meet his eyes. For some reason, she was studying the concrete with great intensity.

"Kaori...look at me." He had switched back to Japanese. She looked back up, her gaze tentatively touching his. "This is someone who I used to know from where I used to live. I don't have time to explain the details to you now, but he is angry with me. I would feel better if you left for now, and I will explain things to you later. Also, before you go, can I borrow your bokken?"

"My bokken?" Kaori hesitantly touched her favorite practice bokken where stuck out of her school bag at a jaunted angle. She preferred her own bokken to the shinai the school provided, so she carried it to and from school on practice days. "What do you need my bokken for?"

Kevin choose his words carefully, not certain of what was going to happen once she left. "I was thinking I should get some extra practice in. Is it okay? I'll give it back tomorrow, I promise." He tried to smile reassuringly, but she probably knew that his smile was forced.

That smile is soooooo FAKE, Kaori thought, eyeing Kevin's face with trepidation. What he had said wasn't exactly a lie, but nor was it the truth. But it was a fact, either way.

"Fine. A sword is for protection. Remember that, okay?" She pushed the old wooden practice sword into his hand and then quickly kissed the hand that still held her other. With that she ran past him, and then past the tall boy, and out the gate. ~*~*~ Kevin watched Kaori sprint out the gateway, and then turned back to the tall boy.

"Samuel Sanguinetti, I am NOT happy with you." Kevin eyed the other boy's tall frame as he shrugged his massive shoulders. "And she is not my 'bitch'. She is my girlfriend."

Sam stepped forward to where Kevin stood, and poked the shorter boy in the chest. "But Kevin, you don't like -girls-, remember? And I don't recall us ever breaking up, do you?"

Kevin stepped back and threw up his hands. "This is not the place to discuss this! Just because they are Japanese, doesn't mean they can't understand us, you know! Follow me, okay?"

Kevin led Sam back to his house. The sat down on the porch, Kevin against a wooden post, Kaori's bokken resting against his shoulder comfortably. If it were only a little heavier, Kevin thought, missing his sakabattou for the first time since his reincarnation. He never

thought he would need to use a sword of any kind again, wooden or otherwise, but everything about Sam's posture told him otherwise.

Sam had leaned back against an opposite wooden post, but remained standing, his arms crossed over his chest, one leg crooked, and his foot on the post. "So are we going to talk like good little flamers? We couldn't ruin out clothes, now could we?" Sam bit out.

Kevin looked up into Sam's angry face. "Perhaps you noticed that my significant other is now female? Whether we were or are gay has nothing to do with this. You say we never broke up? Well fine. Then I'm dumping you. I'm with Kaori now. I know you're not the type to stay friends with your ex's so maybe you should just--AAH!!"

"I don't like this cold politeness Kevin. You are not breaking up with me." Sam hauled Kevin up by his shirt front. Or he attempted to. He felt a blow hit his chest, to see Kevin -flying- away, and after a perfect back flip in mid air, he landed in a crouch several feet away on his lawn. Sam stared at him in amazement. The blow wasn't enough to hurt him, or knock him down, but he couldn't believe what his eyes told him he'd seen. Kevin had rebounded off his chest using his feet, and landed perfectly. He'd never known Kevin to be terribly coordinated unless he was dancing, and certainly not athletic to the extent necessary to perform that cute little stunt. But he had done it, almost as if he'd been doing such things for years.

"How...how did you do that?" Sam sputtered, taking an instinctive step towards Kevin. He stopped in midstride when he saw through the shadows that the fringe of flame colored hair created. Eyes that were normally a warm purple burned a frozen blue now. That was the only word Sam had for it. They burned.

The figure in front of him stood up slowly, so that more than anything he appeared to -uncoil-. He couldn't think of the cold figure in front of him as Kevin. He had been warm, and almost girlish at times. Even before he'd gotten angry, Kevin had still been completely different from when he'd left California.

That 'Oh no, my favorite shirt! This was a Gucci too!' attitude was gone. The severe black slacks and high-collared jacket suited the remote person in front of him; it would not have suited Kevin at all.

But strangely enough, even as foreign as this person seemed there was something so familiar about it. He could remember seeing Kevin this angry once before, but he couldn't really remember when. Something to do with a police officer... Sam shook his head briskly to clear his thoughts.

Kevin watched the confusion march across Sam's handsome face. But through the confusion also showed a great amount of hurt. Sam probably had loved Kevin, he thought to himself, momentarily forgetting that he was Kevin now. How strange it was to think like one person, and be another! But now was not the time to back down.

"Look, I'm sorry about this." Kevin's posture had softened considerably. After all...he could very well be looking at who Sano had become. "But really. I have a girlfriend now. You live in an

entirely different country, on an entirely different continent, on the complete other side of the world..."

Sam shook his head, almost wearily. "You're not Kevin. You act nothing like Kevin did. That sword in your hand may be wooden, but you seem to know how to use it. Kevin didn't know how to fight; he was a dancer. You're not Kevin." Sam repeated as he looked up at him, pain evident in his chocolate brown eyes.

"I am Kevin." He insisted. "I am. I'm just not the one you're used to. Things are different now."

A pained chuckle crossed with a sob left Sam's chest. "Che. I guess they are." He straitened his shoulders, pain evident in his posture. Part of him did remember this boy more fondly; part of him remembered everything about this boy. To part of me, Kevin thought, this boy was my lover. I will miss him. And I don't want him to leave so sad.

"Do you mind...if I kiss you goodbye?" Sam whispered, bringing Kevin back out of his memories. "I mean, I'm sure I'll never see you again, so..."

If it will make him feel better...Kevin let that thought trail off in his head, as he nodded his okay. Sam stepped forward, and swept him up in his arms, for a moment only burrowing his face in Kevin's hair. Kevin had never remembered feeling so small; Sam was extremely tall, and now he could feel his feet dangling six inches off the ground.

It was shock when Sam kissed him. It was as if Sam was trying to devour something important inside of him, so that he could take it home with him. It was overwhelming to be attacked this way...but somehow pleasant.... ~*~*~ Kaori has stopped short when she saw Kevin literally bounce off the taller boy's chest, and had been completely shocked when she saw him execute a back flip, and land in a fluid crouch some distance away. She had followed them when they left the school grounds. Even though something in her head had told her Kevin could take care of himself, she wanted to be there, just in case he needed her help. But from the litte stunt he just preformed, it seemed he was far more adept then she could have ever guessed, and had probably even been holding back during all their Kendo practices. Although it was obvious now that Kevin would indeed be fine, just as that mysterious piece of her brain that had taken to talking to her had said, she still wanted to stay. For awhile they just stood cross for each other, and occasionally, one of the two would make some kind of angry gesture.

Eventually though, Kevin's posture softened, and the taller boys' became more and more dejected. But that was all she could see from a little more then half a block away.

Eventually it seemed the Kevin had softened entirely, and the tall boy swept him up in a bear hug, with Kevin's feet dangling some six inches off the lawn. But then the taller boy kissed him! She watched her boyfriend slide his arms around another BOY'S neck, as though he didn't mind....

Maybe he didn't? But...Scenes from another time swept through her head. Last time had been much worse, but at least it had been a

girl...Kaori didn't even realize she was crying, until she realized that the distant forms had blurred to being unrecognizable. She had been right earlier when she had felt something slipping away...

Without another glance, Kaori turned and ran.

~*~*~ Chapter 10 "I heard a rumour... It was just a rumour... I heard a rumour... What have you done to her?"

"Arabian Knights" Siouxi & The Banshees Kaori ran. It was comforting to feel her muscles ache as they did, because it momentarily dulled the pain of what she had just seen. It was instinct that guided her home; her sight was too badly blurred by tears for it to be anything else.

In a way though she was glad, she thought, as her speed tore her hair back from her face, that she had found out so quickly. It could have been worse, so much worse... A new layer of sobs bubbled up from the depths of her chest, and she wanted so badly to be at home, locked in her room, away from everyone...

Not too far now....she tried to comfort herself, You're almost there, just another block...

And then she was there, and with sob of relief this time, she slowed as she ran through the old dojo's gates. Still though, she hurried inside, and past her mother's intruding eyes, and after kicking off her shoes, she thundered up the stairs attempting to make no more, but no less, noise than she always did. She did not holler her customary "Okaa-san! Tadaima!" She was afraid her voice would shake too badly, and betray her distress.

None too soon, she entered her room, and closed the door behind her, making sure she had turned the lock. Nearly ripping them in her haste, she removed her school uniform, and dove into bed, face first. Her pillow would be her only solace. Her pillow always listened, it was never rude, or late, and it never cheated on her...

How was she going to look at Kevin tomorrow? She'd burst into tears if she saw him. All she could do was resolve herself to not look at him, especially not while he smiled (she'd melt instantly, and she knew it) and if she had to, she would think of how...comfortable...he looked with that other boy. If she replayed that in her mind she could stay mad, and if she stayed mad...then she could get through this.

If she stayed angry she could ignore how incredibly hurt she was, even though they had only been dating a week. But the truth was, she wanted to believe that what she had seen hadn't been real. She wanted to believe that all of that afternoon had been a dream and that there was no strangely familiar, and extremely handsome foreigner kissing her boyfriend.

Former boyfriend, she added to herself almost as an afterthought, as she felt her eyes start to drift closed from all the effort such an involved crying spree had taken.

And soon after, Kaori fell asleep, tears still trailing down her cheeks.

~*~*~

Kevin let his gaze stray worriedly to Kaori's empty desk. To his knowledge, she was NEVER absent, and NEVER late. It went against her grain.

It was almost two hours into class when Kaori finally showed up. Her face was a little puffy, and her eyes were blood-shot. Her normally immaculate appearance was anything but- her hair hadn't been brushed and had been pulled into a messy ponytail, when she normally wore it down. Her school uniform was wrinkled, and looked like it had been thrown in a crumpled heap into a corner and left there.

Kevin, for the life of him, couldn't figure out what could be wrong. Maybe she'd had a fight with her parents? He fingered her bokken where it stuck out of his schoolbag.

He could do nothing to soothe her at present, he'd have to wait until lunch. He eyed her worriedly for the next two hours; that was all he could do.

The moments ticked by ever so slowly, but even still the second hand on the clock moved. When it completed its circle, the minute hand jumped forward a pace. Round and round went the second hand, and slowly but surely, the minute hand followed, and even slower still, the hour hand. Kevin contemplated the irony of his situation to no small degree, and although he disliked the idea, he had to admit the old saying was wrong:

A watched pot DOES boil, but only when it got darned good and ready to do so, and this evil clock on the wall of his classroom seemed to have the same kind of attitude.

But surely enough, the time did pass, even if its speed was far too slow for Kevin's taste. He shot out of his seat as though out of a cannon the instant the lunch bell rang. He folded his arms on the front of Kaori's desk and sank into a squat, peering over the edge.

His first clue that something was really wrong was when she briefly looked up at him, and the instantly lowered her head again.

"Kaori, what's wrong?" He inquired, reaching to lift her chin so he could look at her.

She swiped at his hand, brushing him away. She didn't say anything for a minute, and then said in a low whisper "Can I have my bokken back now, please?"

Kevin felt something akin to dread settle in the pit of his stomach. He ignored the possibility that jumped instantly into his brain. He'd watched her leave. And so he tried again, this time his eyebrows puckered together, his worry showing not only in his face, but also in his voice. "Kaori....Please. Tell me what's wrong."

Although her eyes were hidden behind the thick curtain that were her bangs, Kevin thought he saw a little of the shiny wetness before she could manage to swipe it away with a quick brush of her hand. Once again she was silent; her breathing was deep and slow, as though she

were trying to steady herself.

"Kevin." Kaori kept her voice low. She knew that this would already generate rumours; they were still in the classroom, and while some of the students had left, a greater portion of them had stayed. She was sure that many, very curious stares were being shot their way. And so she needed to stay calm for now. She needed to keep her voice steady for now.

"Kevin." Kaori said again, "I saw you with him. I saw everything."

All his blood abruptly dropped into his feet, and his body went completely numb. He must have turned an alarming shade of white, because now the curious looks they had been getting before intensified tenfold.

He blinked his eyes a few times to clear his sight. He had a sudden urge to burst into tears. He reached for her hand, in hopes that she would allow him to take it. She drew away from him, as though pulling into a shell. He left his hand laying on her desk, and he pitched his voice as low as possible to keep it from shaking as he spoke. "Please let me explain things to you. You don't have to forgive me, but let me explain. Please. You don't ever have to speak to me again afterwards if that's what you want." No matter how he tried, a note of desperation snuck into his voice.

At this Kaori raised her head a little, enough for him to see her eyes. They were puffy and blood-shot, just as he'd thought earlier, although now, her eyes were completely dry. "And what if I don't want to hear it?" she asked him quietly, her voice deadly calm.

Kevin stood up slowly, one of the joints in his knees protesting with a loud pop. He made his way back to his desk, and grabbed his book bag. Once again, he walked back to Kaori's desk, and pulled her bokken out of his bag, and laid it quietly on the hard wooden writing surface. With that done, he turned and walked out of the classroom.

~*~*~ Kaori hadn't expected Kevin to just pick up and walk out. She watched him march mechanically out of the classroom, his gait stiff, and his face that of a stone figure, frozen in time and lost on a faraway island.

Kaori had seen that look on her own face before and knew very well what it meant. She could almost see him sweeping up the remains of his shattered heart into a little plastic dustbin.

She watched the door as class resumed. Some part of her believed that Kevin would come back to class and she could apologize for being so cruel. He hadn't lied to her. He hadn't denied what she had seen. He hadn't even begged for forgiveness; all he'd wanted was for her to listen. She wasn't angry with him, she realized as she stared at the papers on her desk. Her pride was hurt. That's why she had refused his request.

A small and nearly silent gasp escaped her; how many people had she refused out of pride? Some of the girls of the school had tried to talk to her before, and she had snubbed them. In fact, she had snubbed almost everyone who wasn't part of the Kendo club. But why

had she done that? She didn't used to be this way.

Shiro.

But could she blame everything on him? He may have been part of the reason she avoided everyone; the mental anguish he'd caused her had made her want to hide in the deepest hole, as far away from anyone else as possible. He'd made her feel like trash to be thrown away...

And perhaps she had avoided deeper contact with everyone, just to avoid feeling that way ever again? So perhaps part of it was his fault.

But it had been her -choice- not to recover from what happened. Her choice. Her parents had put her into therapy after the fact, the psychologist had always told her that he wanted to help her, if she would only let him. But she had to make a -choice- to recover. She hadn't made that choice. She had managed to convince him that she would be able to function in everyday life; and that was where the therapy had ended.

Now, two years later, she understood what the psychologist had meant. She would recover when she was ready, when she decided to stop living what had happened to her everyday of her life and wallowing in the remaining pain, because that was all she felt she had left. Now she knew different. All she had left had walked out of the classroom at lunch. And before him, she'd had nothing at all.

~*~*~

Later that day, Kaori walked dejected towards the school gates, trying to think of some way to patch things up. She passed through the gates, not noticing until he was practically on top of her, that someone was waiting for her.

The tall boy from the day before jumped in front of her and gestured for her to stop. If possible, today's outfit was even more outrageous than the last. His chest was covered in a veil of fishnet, and...and...Kaori blinked not quite believing what she saw. He was wearing a long and rather graceful looking skirt, and over which was a curious belt that had long bits of thin chain strung between metal loops, in a descending fashion. His shoes rather alarmed her when she noticed them. They had a very sharply pointed toe, and silver buckles going all the way up the side; she counted 12 in all.

The tall boy let her stare, a grin lighting his features making him appear boyish. "If you're done staring at me, I'd like to talk to you."

The boy's English sounded weird to her, his accent was thick with something she'd never heard before. She blinked a couple of times, processing what she had heard, and translating in her head. After deciding that her translation was accurate, she nodded slowly, not quite sure what else to say.

He waved his hand forward, gesturing for her to join him. "I don't bite, you know."

~*~*~

Kaori found herself at a small coffee shop that cattered to foreign tourists. It had a small inclosed patio away from the street. The tall boy bought her a soda, and for himself, a steaming cup of a deathly black looking brew.

"You know, Kevin never told me your name." The boy stirred his coffee while dumping sugar packet after sugar packet into it.

"Kaori. Myoujin Kaori...." She took a sip of her soda, not sure she liked the particular one he's picked. It was pale green and sickly sweet.

The boy gave her a small salute. "Nice to meet ya, Kaori. I'm Sam. I'm sure I'm making all kinds of cultural blunders, but you'll have to forgive them. I have a story to tell you."

Sam paused, as if unsure of how to begin. "About a year ago, I met a boy who I fell completely in love with. It was very confusing to me because that person was male, and I didn't think that I bent that way. But that person helped me figure out what was important to me. He helped me do what I wanted to do. It's thanks to him that I have my job."

"Now remember that I loved this boy with all my heart." Sam continued "He helped me quit speed, and helped me study for my GED. This boy gave and gave, never caring what he got in return. And then...one day his parents told him he had to move far away, to the otherside of the world. When he told me, he kissed me, gave me his phone number, and said goodbye."

"I went out to visit him, to discover that he'd already completely forgotten about me, and had found a beautiful girlfriend. He and I exchanged words, and eventually he gave up, and explained the facts to me. He always had a way of making me see. So I accpeted what he said, and asked him if I could kiss him goodbye. I knew I'd never see him again, and this boy was my first love... I kissed him goodbye, and went back to my hotel room, not planning to visit him again. But today, he showed up at my hotel room, in tears and shaking. He told me his girlfriend had seen us kiss, and now she wouldn't forgive him. He wasn't sure if it was because I was male or just because. Tell me what you think of this story."

Kaori looked at the tall boy in front of her. At first she hadn't realized who he was talking about, but now...This was Kevin's ex-boyfriend. There was nothing else he could be. After a few moments of silence, she said softly, "I don't know what to think."

Sam looked down at the girl in front of him, her hands wrapped around her cup of soda, and huddled down in her chair. She did seem very confused. He shook his head. He have to spell everything out. What a trial. The things he did for Kevin...

Sam put a long slim brown cigarette in his mouth, and flicked open his silver lighter. The tip caught, and he took a long deep draw off it. What a trial indeed. "Kevin loves you." He said bluntly, and Kaori looked up at him sharply. "He had no problems telling me goodbye. I know he cared for me a lot. But I don't think he loved me. He loves you. You two have been together, what, a week at most? Normaly when a boy is dumped after only a week, he just thinks to

himself 'Ah hell, screw her anyway' and goes on with his life. Kevin was practically hysterical when I saw him earlier. "

"He...was?" Kaori ventured. It was obvious that Sam was very protective of Kevin.

"I hope you didn't decide not to forgive him just because it was a guy he kissed?" Sam spoke, his voice becoming low in pitch, beginning to sound almost like a growl, "If you're that shallow, then he doesn't need you anyway. That's something else Kevin taught me. You can love someone regardless of what sex they are. It just doesn't matter. If you limit yourself that way, you could be missing the most important person in your life. You should love someone for what they are inside, regardless of their gender. Sex is just a result of love. Because I still love Kevin, I want him to be happy. And I think that he can be happy with you. But you need to forgive him."

Kaori's felt her eyes go as wide as saucers. All of what Sam had said had struck a chord deep inside her, and she took it all to heart. Her vision blurred, and she quickly blinked the tears away. She wasn't sure why she had almost started crying. Taking Sam's large hand in one of her smaller ones, she looked him in the eye, and smiled. "Thank you Sam. I'll go talk to Kevin tonight." Sam colored deeply, and said gruffly "You're welcome. I better not have to fly out here again next time you guys have a fight."

"I'm going to go now." Kaori stood up leaving her unfinished soda on the table top. "Is Kevin at his house?" Sam only nodded; she'd caught him while he was dragging off his cigarette. "I'll go over there now then!" Kaori made for the small gate that led from the patio back out to the street.

"Remember what I said, Miss Kaori! Don't make me come back out here!"

~*~*~ Chapter 11

"All my instincts, they return, And the Grand Façade, so soon will burn, Without a noise, and without my pride, I reach out from the inside..." Your Eyes, Peter Gabriel

"Nicky, I don't know what to do!" Kevin threw his hands up. "If she decides never to talk to me again, doesn't it ruin everything?"

Nicky was silent, staring darkly at Kevin's bedspread. "Yes it does. But..." Nicky paused again, shifting in her perch at the foot of Kevin's bed. "I have a feeling that this is God messing with us. It likes to watch us suffer... That's what it does for fun. But I don't think that it would end everything so quickly. It enjoys torturing you too much for this to be the end."

Kevin only nodded, not quite sure of what to make of what Nicky had said. It was very upsetting to know that you were a cosmic chew-toy. But most of all, he kept seeing Kaori's eyes as she had looked up at him and said "And what if I don't want to hear it?" There had been no forgiveness there, absolutely no interest in listening to his side at all.

It had been a long time since he'd felt like this. Depression was

settling inside him, taking away the feeling, his chest feeling more and more hollow as the minutes passed. Now it had developed to a cavernous emptiness. He felt like his ceiling looked; starkly white, blank, and lifeless. He rolled over, from his back to his side, and looked absently at his hand where it lay beside his head on the pillow, and thought that his hand looked like something foreign all of a sudden, the way his fingers curled reminding him strangely of a dead insect.

Nicky eyed Kevin's increasingly blank expression with fright. He was retreating inside himself, locking his pain inside, where it could do the most damage. She did the only thing she could think of. Grabbing him by the front of his T-shirt, she hauled him up to a sitting position, and cuffed him sharply across the cheekbone. His blank, dull, purple eyes cleared for a moment, and then clouded again. Fear settled in the pit of Nicky's stomach. He's giving up, she thought, and he hasn't even really started his fight yet!

She slapped him again, much harder this time, and shook him roughly. "Listen to me. If you want to lay here like a worthless piece of trash, then go ahead. But relinquish me of my duties. If you're not even willing to keep trying, then my job is finished. You can waste the rest of your time here in this life, and think of what you've done wrong, and how everything has been a horrible mistake!"

"Or," She said shaking him again, roughly enough to give him whiplash. "Or, you can try to fix your mistake! You were telling me that everyday, Kaori is becoming more like Kaoru. Maybe Kaori wouldn't have listened to you, but Kaoru would! She would! Kaoru would stay mad for a while, but eventually she would listen. So are you gonna sit here and let me shake you like a dead fish or are you going to do something?"

He was completely ignoring her now. He dangled from the inside of his shirt, Nicky's hold ready to tear the shirt at any second. Disgustedly, she let him flop back on his bed. "I'm going to tell you a story. Whether you listen or not is up to you."

Nicky took a deep breath and paused for a minute. She couldn't be sure, but she thought she might have gotten his attention. "I wasn't always a Heavenly Guide, you know. I was human once too. But it was a very long time ago, so long that I have no idea what country I lived in, because the name I had for it is lost to time."

"I married a man who was the head of our clan. For some reason he'd fallen in love with me from afar. He and my father arranged the marriage. I hated them both for not asking me."

"But I did as my father wished. I married into the ruling family of our clan. My husband was never anything but kind to me, but because of the circumstances behind our wedding, I refused him everytime."

"Eventually, my husband's kindness and consideration for my wishes won me over and so we lived happily for a few months. That was when the neighboring clan decided they wanted our farmland, and war broke out, and he had to leave to fight. The war was a long one; both our clans were fairly large."

"Many months, I think, somewhere over half a year later, I received

news that my husband had been killed in the war. Without any hesitation what so ever, I threw myself from the highest spire of our home. I died instantly when I hit the hard rocky earth, my neck snapped almost double."

"That was the first time I met God. It informed me that committing suicide had severely impaired my chances for a happy incarnation, and killed any chance I would have had at meeting my husband again in a future life. So it cut me a deal. If I guided tortured souls like myself, and helped them find what they were looking for, I could eventually see him again."

As Nicky spoke, Kevin's eyes slowly cleared and at first, it was only sounds to him. However if he listened harder the sounds separated into distinct words and the words made up an interesting story. By the time she had finished talking he was actually mildly curious of the outcome. Nicky had finished and been silent for quite a while when Kevin finally spoke up. "...Did you ever see him again?"

Nicky hid her eyes, and from what he could see of the other half of her face, her mouth was hard and the small muscles in her jaw stood out as she clenched her teeth together. "Yes. I did. But something God had never told me was that no matter how hard I tried, he would never be mine again. He already had a soul mate. I was assigned as his guide to help him find her again, and it was very painful at first; I almost refused to do it. But in the end I agreed because I still loved him, even after so many hundreds of years. So now I just look forward to my penance ending so I can be reincarnated and live a normal life again. I'm tired of helping people achieve their goals, and not being able to achieve mine. But this is my last assignment, and then my time in Purgatory is over."

Kevin's eyes were wide as saucers as he looked at Nicky, and she could only shake her head at the pole-axed expression Kevin wore. "Thought being a Heavenly Guide was a reward did you? Now are you going to be stupid like me, and give up, and spend the rest of not just your life but your entire cosmic existence making up for a mistake that could have easily been avoided? I'll let you think on that. I can only materialize for so long, and I'm starting to get tired...."

Instead of Nicky's normal happy puff of smoke, she devolved, particles of her materialized body falling all over the carpet, and then further desolving until nothing was left of her physical body at all.

Kevin watched the particles melt into the carpet, confusion running a merry race through his head. Now he wasn't sure what to do at all. Nicky's chastisement almost made him feel as if he had no -right- to be depressed. Momentarily, he bristled at that thought, though eventually a more sensible voice, a remainder of who he used to be, spoke up.

She's right, you know.

He shook his head wearily. What had giving up ever gotten him before? Last time, he'd sat completely desolate for so long that birds could have nested in his hair, and he wouldn't have noticed... If it hadn't been for Aoshi discovering the truth, he probably would have sat there until he died. In fact, he had fully planned to do that.

It had been pathetic, really. But hadn't he just almost relapsed into that state? In a way this was just as painful. Death may be final, but there often isn't a choice. It wasn't as if Kaoru had asked for that whole thing to happen. But this time...This time, it had been her decision; she had told him, "And what if I don't want to hear it?"

Nothing, nothing had hurt more then that. Knowing that although she was still there, and no matter how much he reached out for her, that she would only draw away, not caring. If she ended up choosing never to speak to him again, it was almost as final as death, and just as painful, because it was something he had done that had driven her away.

And even worse, there was nothing he could do about it. If or when she ever wanted to listen, it had to be entirely her choice. It would be completely on her terms, because he had lost all negotiation rights. Overwhelming tides of helplessness swept through him. He couldn't just sit here like a lump. If he had to wait, he would wait, but he needed something to do while he was waiting. ~*~*~ Nicky felt herself rematerialize, and as her body reformed itself, she looked around. The Heavenly Throne Room.

She was almost completely formed again, when a vicious slap met with her cheek, knocking her witless to highly polished tiles of the Throne Room floor. An absolutely livid omnipotent being stood over her, it's chest heaving in bearly surpressed rage, fingers curled to look like claws.

"Insolent wench! I can not -believe- you told him that! You know that's against policy! You blatantly defied me, and even worse you don't seem to care!" The being continued to seethe, seeing that nothing it said was having and effect on Nicky.

Slowly picking herself up of the floor, Nicky straitened up, and squared her shoulders. "Your Majesty; he didn't realize who I was talking about. He would have said something to me if he had." Nicky had developed the ablity over time to look God strait in the eye as she spoke to it. She knew this annoyed It to no end; so few people could do it without soiling a perfectly good pair of undies beyond repair.

The cosmic entity eyed Nicky, in a way she would almost think of wary. It looked her up and down, and then finally spoke. "Do NOT let it happen again. Next time it will not be Purgatory; it will be Hell. And it will be permanent."

"However," the being continued "I'll have to admit that the show has gotten pretty interesting! As a Heavenly Guide you've always been horrible, but perhaps it will comfort you to know that you've always been a good source of entertainment! Anyway," The being snapped it fingers three times, in a 'Z' shaped motion, "Poof! Be gone!" And with that, Nicky found herself once again banished to earth; her particles purposely scattered to the four winds. It would take her hours to be able to rematerialize again... ~*~*~ Kevin busily shoved all his dark non-dry cleaning required clothing into the washing machine. Laundry just wasn't what it used to be. All he had to do was turn it on, dump his clothing and some detergent into it, and poof! A half-hour later, your clothing is clean again. The dryer held the same concept; it took all the fun out of it.

He closed the washing machine, and the lid made its customary metallic thud. After Nicky had left, he'd taken a quick shower, and tied his hair back while it was still wet. He didn't feel like blow drying it, so he left a few wispy bits of his bangs fall forward and then covered his head with a purple bandana, his ponytail falling out the back. Right now, he still felt about an inch tall, and when one feels like that, one cannot stand to wear something that is the least bit restraining. Kevin was no exception. He wore a huge pair of Kik Wear brand raver jeans, and a ratty white T-shirt that said "Heaven Sent" in pink cursive letters across the front.

Kevin heaved a great sigh, and sunk down against the hallway wall, knees pulled up to his chest. He needed to have a plan. A strategy. Even a stupid sceme. Something to take his mind off the situation. He didn't actually have to follow said plan, strategy or stupid scheme; he just needed to be thinking about it to keep his mind occupied.

He'd learned that situations were never as hopeless as they seemed; they were often more hopeless then they seemed, or not hopeless at all. Kevin sincerely hoped that this was not as hopeless at it seemed. He heaved himself off the ground, and turned to go back up his room to get another load of laundry together. Remembering suddenly that his parents weren't home, he popped one of the CDs they most hated into his player and turned it up loud, and "Ophelia" by Tear Garden echoed through the house.

He quickly filled another basket with clothing and headed downstairs to the laundry room again to drop it off. The torrent of synthesizers and drum machines mixed with deep soothing British voices fit his mood perfectly. It had been awhile since he'd been in the correct state of mind to enjoy Gothic music.

He remembered Sam saying something about Kevin having been a dancer; and he found himself doing just that. Prancing though his house, his movements matching the weirdness of the song as it changed from melodic vocals to mechanically filtered noise, his steps holding the grace of a ballet dancer.

He swept into the house's large linoleum tiled entry hall. The slick floor allowed him the space he needed to work out his emotions; this style of dancing had always been good for that. He bobbed and spun, somehow not quite following the beat, but not the voice either, and yet still melding with the mournful tone of the song.

After an interlude of stillness the song picked back up again; he kicked one leg out in front of him, and then crooked it again in such away that the quick movement turned him 180 degrees. The song slowed to a close and with one leg planted behind the other for balance, he leaned backwards so far that his fingers nearly dangled against the floor, his back bowed almost to a bridge. Still bowed, he let his arms circle back up till they were strait into the air, and as slowly as he could manage, he straitened up, leaving his head tilted back until the very last moment, and the snapping it level again.**

Silence filled the house as the song ended. Through the silence the sound of one person applauding echoed through the empty house. Kevin's eyes snapped open, and suddenly he realized that he didn't

know when they had drifted closed. He looked around, finding Kaori standing in the doorway to his house, her eyes wide with wonder. He took a few deep breaths to steady himself. "Um..." he ventured. "How long have you been watching me?"

Kaori shook her head dumbly for a moment, but finally replied, "Not very long. I rang the bell 5 or 6 times, and you couldn't hear me. I figured it wasn't your parents listening to music that loud, so..." She looked at her feet, and dug one toe into the linoleum tile nervously.

"So..." Kevin trailed off. "Well, come in then, don't just stand there." Kevin offered a weak smile which faltered and fell away after barely a moment. He gestured briefly for her to follow him up the stairs.

As they entered what Kaori thought must be Kevin's room, he immediately turned off his stereo. She looked around absently, noting the posters on his wall; rock bands she'd never heard of. His bookshelves were full of books she would probably never care to read. It became obvious to her in that moment how different Kevin truly was from what she had thought; but not personality wise. He seemed to be interested in everything. His books went from classic and modern English literature and Horror, Psychology and Anthropology, liberally spiced by books on every different religion she's ever heard of, and some she hadn't.

Kevin motioned for her to sit on his bed, while he sank gracefully down into a cross-legged position on the floor. They stared blankly at each other, neither having any idea what to say to the other. Eventually Kevin just looked at the ground; he certainly hoped that she hadn't come just to stare at him.

Some uncomfortable moments later, Kaori cleared her throat and broke the silence. "I..." she began tentatively, but not quite managing to get the words out. Kevin looked up at her hoping; she read the message clearly off his face, and gained courage from it. "I came to say I'm sorry. I didn't listen to you, and I should have. Sam came to the school and explained things to me...and I guess...I probably would have done the same thing."

Kaori closed her eyes for a moment. Kevin looked horrible, just like Sam had said. However, when she had walked in, and he was dancing, he'd seemed completely blissfully lost in the music, and she almost felt...bad... for making him come back to reality. She opened her eyes, wondering how Kevin was going to react.

Large lavender eyes peered up at her from the floor, glowing in blissful happiness, and a wide grin full of teeth was her answer.

Kevin silenced his brain's need to think, as he bounded off the floor and scooped Kaori up in his arms in a hug. Kaori yelped loudly, and he quickly set her back down. He took both of her hands in each of his, pressed his forehead against hers, their noses touching lightly.

"I'm sorry too." Kevin whispered rubbing their noses together a little. "For not telling you anything, I mean. I guess I should have, although, I don't know how I would have gone about it..." Kaori put

her index finger to his lips, silencing him.

"Sssh. It's okay. There are a lot of things about me you don't know. I mean, everyone has secrets right? There are reasons for a person not to tell everything about them." A huge feeling of DÃ©jÃ Vu flooded through Kaori, one so strong that it tore her away from reality.

Kevin watched Kaori's face momentarily go blank. Mindless words fell out of her mouth, echoes from another time:

"You mean, you don't know anything about me...and it's okay?"

"There are reasons for a wanderer to be wandering, right?"

Kevin shook her gently. "Hey, are you okay?"

Her eyes refocused and cleared almost instantly, but there was a touch of fear hidden in their azure depths. "Yeah. I don't know what came over me."

Kevin pulled her tighter against him, and looked into her eyes, wishing that he could read her exact thoughts as easily as he could read her emotions. He was worried about her. But what she had said...

He still remembered that day so vividly. It had been a landmark in his life. Someone who accepted him for who he was, no questions asked. Nicky was right; Kaoru seemed to be coming back.

~*~*~ Notes:

** My description of the Gothic style of dance can do it no justice. It took me nearly four years to perfect. It's a very emotional style of interprational dance. For those of you who have no idea what I'm talking about; and perhaps Miyu-chan is the only person who will have seen it before; I suggest that you get decked out, put on some dark red lipstick, rat your hair, and go to Gothic club just to watch. Thanks go to Miyu-chan for letting me listen to and tape the Tear Garden CD I ordered for her. It inspired that whole section.

~*~*~ Chapter 12

"Eternal Bliss is something I can show you, Spread your arms and let my wings enfold you, My love...my love..."

In the darkness, shades of crimson rapture, The world is ours alone to capture, My love...my love..."

"Spider and Fly" London After Midnight Kevin couldn't remember having been so happy. Only a few hours ago, he'd been in the throes of deep depression. But that was before he and Kaori had made up. She'd come to his door with hope in her eyes, not that she'd ever had anything to worry about.

And now they lay on Kevin's bed, Kaori comfortably tucked in his embrace, her face buried in his neck, her soft warm breath gliding over his skin. Content was not the word for it. It was so much more than that.

Eyes closed, he drifted comfortably in and out of his thoughts, when he felt the first feather light kisses touch his neck. The soft noise he made deep in his throat only encouraged her, and the kisses went from feathery soft, to hot and open mouthed, running a trail across his windpipe.

Kevin's eyes flew open as Kaori moved slowly from lying next to him, and slid over him to straddle his thighs. She continued her ardent attention to his neck, and one practice roughened hand slid just underneath the hem of his shirt, and slowly glided up his stomach, causing the muscles there to jump and flinch with the contact. When it continued gliding up to his ribs and beyond and was joined by it's twin, Kevin sat up with a gasp.

Gently pushing Kaori back so he could look her in the eyes, "I don't think that's a good idea..." Kevin began, and watched the disappointment blossom in her azure blue gaze.

She looked away, her eyes downcast. "I'm sorry. I thought..." Pausing for a moment, she looked back up at him, her eyes asking for something. One hand moved up to glide lingeringly over his cheek. "I want..." She paused again, searching for the right words. "I want to be with you..."

"Kaori...are you sure this is what you want?" Kevin asked, his concern more then evident in his voice.

"Do you think...after my ex...that I would even think about it, if I wasn't comfortable with the idea?"

Looking away from her probing gaze, "No, I guess not. But I'm still worried... I mean, since I don't even know what happened..." Kaori sent him a look that promised death if the subject was pursued. Waving one arm frantically in placation, he continued "Not that it's any of my business anyway! I'm sure you'll tell me when you feel comfortable with it..." The death threat abated to a simple warning. "As long as you're sure..."

Kaori's expression changed, her eyes reflecting Kevin's doubt. "It sounds to me like you're the one who isn't sure."

"If I sound unsure, it's because I'm worried for you. And... You know how my preferences used to run. I've never been with a girl before." It was Kevin's turn to look away. The part of him that was still Kenshin was very uncomfortable with that part of Kevin, and it was hard to voice his thoughts on the matter.

Kaori giggled, and put a hand over her mouth. When she recovered a moment later, she said "Oh yeah, that's right! They were all guys, huh?"

Kevin blushed scarlet. "Well...yes. Do you have to remind me of that constantly?"

"I think it's cute! And your ex WAS gorgeous..." Kaori poked him gently in the nose with the tip of her fingernail.

"Can we PLEASE not talk about this?" Kevin pleaded, embarrassed. "You're changing the subject!" She seemed to enjoy plaguing him about

his past... relationships. She'd been asking him questions about it all afternoon. He'd managed to field most of them, but there had been some he couldn't get out of.

"Fine, fine. Okay, to put your mind at ease: I've thought about this A LOT. Almost since we first started dating. I trust you, and I know you won't ever hurt me on purpose. I think that's been proven beyond a doubt." Kaori said solemnly, her hand brushing his cheek gently, her large blue eyes serious as they met his own purple ones. She paused for a bit, before continuing, "And also...I think I love you. And as strange as it may sound, I think I always have. Sometimes, I feel like my whole life has just been a prelude to meeting you. That brief period when we were apart was so painful, it was almost like...I'd been physically wounded. I feel like I've been waiting for you for a hundred years."

"What happened to me...I can't tell you about it yet. It still hurts too much." Kaori continued after a moment. "All I can say is that the short time I've know you has made me a different person! You've allowed me to heal myself, in a way I never could have before. And I think that...somehow, you've completed me."

Kevin could only stare at her in wonder. She remembered, she had to! There was no other reason she could have become so like Kaoru in so short a time. The sudden urge to kiss her overwhelmed him, and he slowly and deliberately leaned forward, taking the fullness of her lower lip between his. She responded instantly, latching onto his upper lip with her teeth and tracing it gently with the tip of her tongue. Eventually she deepened the kiss of her own accord, her tongue gently pushing for entrance.

Kevin's arms slid around her waist bringing her more firmly against him, their mouths meshed deeply.

Kaori broke the kiss, and placed her hand on his shoulders, and pushed him gently back onto the pillows. Kevin allowed the action, not entirely sure what he should do. It had been so long...Nearly 135 years. Not that he'd actually been alive that whole time, but that wasn't the point. All he had to go on was his short time with Tomoe and Kevin's memories weren't exactly an option. A blush stained his cheeks when images rose unbidden to the forefront of his mind. NOT an option AT ALL. Wait. Rewind. The foreplay was the same. Briefly, his eyes narrowed, planning.

Kaori sensed Kevin's sudden withdrawal. She sat back a bit and examined Kevin's face for clues. How strange... he seemed to be assessing the situation. His eyes were narrowed in a way that made his normally sweet face look indescribably evil, but at the same time... Kaori shivered at the heat swirling deep inside her. She leaned forward again bringing her face very close to his. "What are you thinking?" She asked, her voice a rough whisper.

One flame colored eyebrow rose nearly into his hairline. "Why do you ask?" answering her question with one of his own.

"Because you're plotting. I can tell." "And what makes you think I will tell you if I am?" Kaori sat up all the way, flustered and confused. What had she done wrong?

Kevin also sat up, and draped his arms loosely around her waist. He

nuzzled her neck, until her head fell back allowing him more access to the long, slender column. His teeth grazed her skin, and then he spoke, his lips moving against her neck, hot breath spilling over the sensitized flesh. "Wouldn't you rather that I show you?"

A gasp escaped her lips as Kevin found the nerve cluster at the base of her neck, and bit into it lightly, sending a shiver down all her nerve endings and they all seemed to converge at the same place... She sucked air in deeply through barred teeth, and finally replied "If that's how you want it..." she gasped out, and felt Kevin smile into her neck.

Her response to him was so immediate! It thrilled him to know that he could make her gasp out loud. He moved his mouth's path lower, traveling down her neck to her collar bone, pausing at the hollow there to nip gently at the tender flesh, before moving to where the neckline of her dress began. His hands were following their own path, sliding underneath the thin material of her short sundress, to glide smoothly up the outside of her slender thighs.

Dear God, how long had he wanted to do this? All those times when he'd 'accidentally' walked in on Kaoru at her bath...the pounding he'd always gotten had been more than worth it. Then there was the time at the hot springs...The only reason Misao had been able to hit him with that bucket was because he'd been too busy trying to get a better look at Kaoru's firm rear to dodge properly. Back then, he'd never had any hope of doing what he was doing now; he'd contented himself with vivid dreams and creative fantasies. Kaori's breath came in heavy gasps. All those dreams she'd been having of Kenshin had started out as just memories, but had become something entirely different the longer she was around Kevin. Perhaps it was because Kevin looked so much like Kenshin, and she wanted so badly for Kevin to really be him that the dreams had transformed into something else? She drew back from him to catch her breath. The combined efforts of his mouth and hands, although they hadn't journeyed anywhere out of the ordinary yet, still made the air stick in her throat, and hiss between her teeth.

He felt her pull back, and at first he thought that she had changed her mind. Her expression told him something completely different. Her skin glowed damply, some of the loose tendrils of hair clinging lightly to the sides of her face. Her lower lip was dark red and swollen, her small sharp teeth having bitten into the tender flesh a little too ferociously. All of that was nice. But it was how her eyes had darkened and shone, and how black feathery lashes lined her passion heavy eyelids. One of the spaghetti thin straps of her sundress had fallen off her shoulder and hung teasingly around her arm.

Kaori absently trailed one hand over Kevin left cheek, his admiring expression turning what of her insides that were left into melted goo.

Part of his brain had cleared when her hand touched his cheek. It had been a very small part. However when he had realized which cheek, and that she was exactly tracing the lines of where his scar used to be, everything focused on her slight touch. She repeated the gesture, possibly unknowing, first tracing the one that had gone from under his eye down to his chin, and then back up from the far edge of his jaw, to just beside his nose. Eyes still velvet soft, she mouthed his

name, but no sound coming out. He couldn't be sure, but he could have sworn that 'Kenshin' had been the word formed by her lips, and not 'Kevin'.

He snatched her hand away from his face, startling her. "Kaori...what did you just say?"

Kaori blinked, the haze fading a little. "Huh?"

"The name you said." He explained. "It wasn't Kevin"

"It wasn't?" Kaori said, her voice almost lost. She hoped that she hadn't said what she thought she had..."What was it?" She inquired.

"Kenshin" he paused, hoping that he would see recognition flare in her eyes. "The name you said was Kenshin."

Terror replaced everything else that had been growing inside her. However, Kevin didn't look angry; his expression was almost completely unreadable. An emotion was hiding deep in the recesses of his lavender eyes, but what it was, she couldn't tell. Obviously, he was waiting for an explanation. Should she tell him about her dreams? The truth was her best option; Kevin would know if she were lying. He always knew when she was leaving things out, so he would know now as well.

"Well..." She began tentatively. "I've been having these dreams. In them, I'm someone else, but I still live in my house, only my house is different. I live there with two other people, and there are a few others that visit all the time. Although I'm not related to them, they were my family. One of them was a young boy, and my student; the other was a rounin who'd decided to stop wandering."

"The more I dreamed of them, the more vivid the dreams became, and personal things about these people were made known to me. The young boy's name was Yahiko, and he'd been forced to work for the Mafia. Yahiko's last name is the same as mine, Myoujin; when I realized that, I went and dug through the family history. It seems that Yahiko was my great grandfather."

"At first it freaked me out that I was dreaming about something that had happened over 100 years ago. And the rounin; I never heard his name in my dreams. Then, I think the third day after I met you, I had my most vivid dream to date."

"In the dreams there was another voice talking, one that had nothing to do with any of the people I was dreaming about. It was telling me things that there was no way I could know. For example, it told me that the whole group had taken a trip to Yokohama and that the faded picture they had had taken was still on the walls of our dojo, and the rounin's old sword was beneath it."

"I sat up from that dream in a pool of sweat, my heart going a mile a minute. Even though I was scared, I got up and walked out to our dojo. I knew the sword was there. My dad had been telling me stories of it protecting our house since I was little. But just as the voice in my dream said, there was the yellowed old picture pinned to the wall above the sword. I can tell you one thing. That has to be the strangest sword I've ever seen; the blade is on the flat side, and

the flat is where the blade should be."

"The next morning, I asked my father who the sword had belonged to. 'A good friend of the woman who gave your great grandfather this dojo' he told me. Since that didn't answer my question, I had to drag the rounin's name out of him. He was surprised that I didn't know; the rounin had been famous. He'd been an assassin during Bakumatsu no Doran. After the war, he'd sworn never to kill again, and became a rounin, and eventually ended up here, where he saved the original owner of our dojo. She asked him to stay and he did. He is still sort of a local legend."

Kaori looked up at Kevin's thunderstruck face. "You must think I'm crazy. And you must be bored, hearing all that history..." Kevin shook his head, his face a cross of terror and hope. The expression was one of the strangest Kaori had yet to see.

"No! Is there anything else? What was the rounin's name?" Kevin knew he was shaking. He could feel adrenaline pulsating through his blood. If only...

Her face skeptical, Kaori slowly continued her story. "His name was Himura Kenshin. In my dreams, I was in love with him. You know, when I first met you, that you looked so familiar to me... And then, when I passed out that day, and you took me home, I realized why. You look just like the man from my dream; you look just like Kenshin, except he had two scars on his left cheek."

For the very first time in his existence, Kevin wondered if it was possible to die from being too happy. She did remember. She really did. That phrase ran through his over-stressed brain again and again. Now, he had to tell her, he had to make her believe. It seemed that she'd already made the connection on some level, and all he had to do was complete it. He could hint and hope she noticed, or he could be direct.

Hinting he dropped out of hand. He wanted her to know right now! She hadn't said what her name had been in the dreams. If he knew, wouldn't that prove it? Instinct took hold, and he pulled Kaori close to him, burying his face in her hair. For a moment it was all he could do not to sob happily into her shoulder.

"Kaoru-dono..." he whispered, and felt her stiffen instantly. "Okaeri...de gozaru..."

Frozen to her place on Kevin's bed, she heard the soft archaic Japanese speech whispered in a voice she remembered only from her dreams. She closed her eyes tightly for a moment, not even daring... Unable to bear any more, she pulled back from him slowly.

She saw the same soft smile Kevin had always smiled, but now it was more. So much more. She knew she'd seen that same smile a hundred times before in her dreams, and even more than that in her last life. Kevin's eyes; the same soft purple she'd also seen a hundred time before, his red hair the same silky mop that she had always wanted so badly to run her fingers through...

Her body still frozen as her mind whirled, all she managed to say in that moment was, "...Kenshin?" and that came out as a rough croak.

She looked so...there wasn't a word able to describe it. Her eyes were wide, the whites visible on all sides, her jaw hanging slack from it hinges as if she were about to speak.

For Kaori, everything was clicking in to place. All the things she had so briefly considered; his appearance, his sword ability that he swore came from nowhere, how he was always able to put her at ease. All these things made sudden sense in a way she thought that the gods would never allow.

Her hand shook as she reached out again to touch his cheek. Somehow, now, she couldn't believe he was real, and that in physical contact she could prove to herself that he would not disappear.

She seemed so fragile in that moment, her azure eyes wide and brilliant with unshed tears, her slender frame quavering. Every once in a while she would gulp down a lung full of air. "Kenshin....?" She ventured again, her voice more steady this time. Her mind must be completely boggled. Well, if he was her, his mind would be boggled too. He held back a chuckle, and took both of her hands in hers. Presenting her with a wide smile full of teeth, he could only nod.

Kevin wasn't prepared for her next action. Quite suddenly, she was in his lap again, this time her long legs curled around his waist. Likewise, her arms had snaked around his neck, as if she was holding on for dear life, and was kissing him in the most wonderfully expressive and mind- numbing way he could think of.

Her hand worked itself into the hair at the nape of his neck, underneath the tie that held it back. After a moment of persistent tugging, the band came loose. Kaori lost no time in gathering the entire flaming mass in her hands and tangling her fingers though it. Her brain was still a muddled mess, but one thought stood absolutely clear of all the others.

This was Kenshin.

~*~*~ Volume One

~OWARI~ ~*~*~

Revsions, and editing complete, 8:27 PM, 10/30/99

Nicky Townsend, battousai@licensedtokill.com Battou1028@aol.com

End
file.